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Children's community space experiences in Nima: Tracing racializing assemblages of the human

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Abstract

This PhD thesis is based on a collaborative exploration into children's everyday experiences and practices in community space, undertaken with the youth-focused NGO Spread-Out Initiative in the Nima neighborhood of Accra, Ghana. Focusing on children's lived experiences in the densely populated Nima neighborhood district, we devised and facilitated participatory, arts-based methods workshops with 17 of the NGO's students (10-17 years) and semi-structured interviews with Nima elders and city authorities. Our research and this thesis concern the children's everyday experiences in community space, and their/our inventive practices and methods of inhabiting, recreating, and imagining community spaces otherwise - through their everyday practices, speculative storytelling, and as a collaboratively produced site-specific intervention.

In this thesis, I argue that children's geographies of post-independent African cities do not fully consider race and racialization in the shaping of subjectivity, space, and spatial experience. I frame a Black feminist geographic work that draws together Spread-Out Initiative's Pan-Africanist approach, our collaborative reflections, local and scholarly discourses on the human, and scholarship demonstrating the production of Blackness in post-independent Ghana. I consider the nuances of these children's everyday experiences and practices in the afterlife of slavery and colonialism, and I conceptualize the children's spatial experiences and practices as an assemblage of their bodies, race (Blackness as genre of the human), affect, material, and space. Through empirically based narratives, I demonstrate that these racializing assemblages of subjection, through which the modern human emerges, do shape these children's experiences, but without fully occluding the alternative modes of Black life that they produce through their everyday inventive, imaginative spatial practices. This thesis therefore contributes to urban studies and geography scholarship by extending Black geographic thinking to contemporary urban Ghana through the specificity of children's embodied experiences and spatial practices in Nima.

Notes on Language

I write this UK PhD thesis in US English, which is my writing language for English and is acceptable within The University of Sheffield's thesis guidelines for the Faculty of Social Sciences (confirmed via email communication on October 7, 2019, see appendix).

This research project was undertaken in a multilingual environment where individuals work between different languages in their everyday speech: Speaking to me and to each other in English, folks borrow words from other languages (such as Hausa, Twi, Ewe, and Yoruba). Sometimes this is their own working between multiple native languages, other times, this is the use of the popularly used word. For example, throughout Nima, the location of this research, people use the Hausa term “lungu” to refer to alleyways or pedestrian pathways between houses, and this is the word I in turn use in this thesis. Similarly, people refer to motorcycle taxis as “okada,” which is a Yoruba word, because of the origin of this phenomenon from Lagos, Nigeria. As a personal stylistic choice, in this thesis I provide an explanation of these words in English, but I do not italicize the non-English words that individuals use. I rather italicize a word to indicate when an individual has *applied a verbal emphasis or stress* on that word.

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Declaration

I, the author (Victoria Ogoegbunam Okoye), confirm that this thesis is my own work.

I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means
(www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means).

This work has not been previously presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

Introduction

Centering children and community space

It is mid-January 2020, and at the edge of Nima neighborhood, on a plot of newly open land still bearing the traces of an Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA)-sponsored demolition, groups of adolescent boys gather and play pick-up football matches. Pushing aside and navigating around the littering debris, the group of boys face off. Their shoes sideswipe bits of rubbish as they move in shifting circles and lines, forwards, backwards, zigzagging, calling out and passing the ball back and forth between them. I pass by this land plot on my weekday walks to the office of Spread-Out Initiative NGO, and most afternoons, perhaps thanks to the vacation break in between school terms, the boys are there. Sometimes I linger, slowing down on my walks to pause and observe their play. With broken concrete blocks salvaged from the demolition, they mark out their field boundaries and the spread of their goalposts. They yell, taunt each other, cheer, and groan, as their play moves across this demolition site-turned-football field. Their voices project within and beyond the field, becoming part of the temporary and evolving coming together of activities, expressions, and bodies in this area, as much a component bringing this place into being as the red spray-painted block letters of the AMA notifying even more building tenants to remove their structures, the music blaring from a nearby electronics store, and the food vendor situated across the street, who turns over ripe plantain on the grill and triangle-shaped pieces of fried yam.

Five months before, this plot of land teemed with single-story cement structures, the homes and shops of metal welders who worked in the area. Then, one Monday morning as I walk this same street on my way to the office, the buildings are gone. The AMA had demolished the structures, making rubble of their cement-block walls, corrugated iron roofs, glass windows, and personal possessions. These demolitions, which in Accra the AMA tactically schedules for early mornings, are a commonplace government city-making process (Olajide & Lawanson, 2021; Gillespie, 2016) with a history grounded in colonial planning processes (Bigon, 2008). These demolitions target and dispossess the many residents who endure (and whose endurance sustains themselves, others, and the city) while they exist within precarious, tiring economic and living conditions and outside city authorities' urban plans (Nikoi, 2020; Simone, 2019).

Yet I want to bring focus back to these boys and their football play. There was really nothing out of the ordinary in their playing, as so many other children do, even in

urbanizing African contexts with few devoted spaces for children’s play and recreation (Narh et al 2020). Yet what I notice in passing those boys gathered to play football, and what I have been noticing surfacing across Nima and in other parts of the city (over the 10 months of this field research and seven years living in Accra), was the value of their practices. In these provisional space-times - in this case, between the demolition and the upcoming moment of new construction - sites like this field become what I will call a community space (Garba, 2010), through these boys’ play, folding together processes of violent destruction and creative, inventive remaking in a single location. Perhaps it is the coincidence of their free time from school vacations and any other responsibilities, the material opening up of this (rubble-strewn) field through dispossession, one boy having the idea, others’ agreement, their footballs, the social connections and friendship bonding these boys, their movements, their yells, their bodies, their love for the sport, which tangle together to produce a fleeting, “animated” coming-together of a public in space (Amin, 2008). This space is of course temporary and provisional, and the start of building construction was imminent. Soon enough, it arrives: Construction workers enclose the land plot with thin corrugated metal sheets nailed to wooden frames, a fence to keep everyone else out. The once-upon-a-time yells, chants, taunts, and groans of boys, their presences, and football play fall away and soon, it is the loud noises, workers’ bodies, materials, designs and plans, and building of construction work emerging.



Image 1. The fenced-in former football field (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

The scene I witness of the boys, their play, and their provisional football field (which take place within a process of demolition, unoccupancy, enclosure, and construction) brings into focus key themes that I center in this PhD thesis. While the fenced-in border marking the construction site is explicit, material, and fixed, it reminds me of the various ways that children seem to navigate and negotiate spaces they can together inhabit, play, socialize, and be at rest. Further, this scene reveals for me how the notion of public space is insufficient for framing this reality. I read the scene as taking place through the coming together of the children's practices, an assembling of various histories, actions, bodies, desires, materials, verbal expressions, and ideas that produce this space. I follow this coming together of human, material, structural, affective, emotional, historical, local, and global processes, and how the potential for these kinds of community spaces (perhaps always provisional spaces) like this ephemeral football field might shift, coming together in other times and places, among other children, for their other purposes, and falling away. This underlines an opportunity to focus on children's everyday experiences and practices within ever-evolving community spaces in Nima neighborhood, to emphasize the meaningfulness of these phenomena as socio-material coming together, and with emerging, sometimes fading, possibly provisional, potential.

In this thesis, I articulate a critical and collaborative investigation exploring children's embodied experiences as they emerge from assemblages of community space in the Nima neighborhood of Accra, Ghana. In this thesis, I position Nima, and by extension the city of Accra and Ghana, a post-independent and majority Black country, within the afterlife of slavery and colonialism (Hartman, 2007). As Jemima Pierre asserts, "Africa could not represent a more racialized location - and yet the continent and its peoples are left out of our current discussions and theorizations of race...and its continuous and active processes on the continent" (Pierre, 2013, p. xii). By extension, children's geographies of post-independent African cities do not fully consider race and racialization in the shaping of subjectivity, space, and everyday spatial experience. In response, I frame this as a Black feminist geographic project focused on children's experiences of racializing assemblages of community space, in a move that aligns with emerging scholarship theorizing Blackness and racialization within post-independent and majority Black countries, particularly West African (Bowles, 2021; Hirsch, 2019; Pierre, 2013; Holsey, 2008).

Black geographies scholarship concerns the "complex spatialities of Black life, oppression, resistance, and radical imagination" tied to the interlocking systems of

racial oppression in the production of space and spatial experience (Hawthorne, 2019, p. 2). Drawing on my own positionality (as a Black woman, an Igbo diasporan of US and Nigerian nationality), my research partner's Pan-Africanist ideology rooted in collaboration between African and diasporan individuals to create spaces of learning, and in alignment with the fact that some of children involved in this research recognize their racialized-as-Black identities, I use a global Black geographies lens to broaden understandings of Blackness and Black spatial experience as shaped in Ghana. I conceptualize the children's spatial experiences and practices within the assembling of their bodies, racialization (Blackness as genre of the human), their felt and emotional experiences, material, and space. This thesis represents my endeavor to theorize Blackness from Nima, drawing on children's spatial experiences and practices of space-making in conversation with global Black struggles to make place. I do this by situating this collaborative PhD research within the global discourses of Black thought from across Africa and the African Diaspora. I draw together multiple influences demonstrating the production of Blackness in post-independent Ghana, and I consider the nuances of these children's everyday experiences and practices in the afterlife of slavery and colonialism. By centering Black (African and African diasporan) Studies and Black feminist thought in this thesis, I theorize children's experiences in the Nima neighborhood in Accra, Ghana as an extension of Black life. This project brings together these considerations to learn from the embodied realities and lived experiences of children who are racialized, gendered, and living in the afterlives of slavery and colonialism as articulated in contemporary Accra. Thus, this doctoral thesis is an epistemological, methodological, and empirical endeavor.

I use this chapter to situate this research project. Having introduced the phenomenon at the center of this research project - the embodied experiences of children in the context of community spaces in Nima - I now want to take a step back and situate myself within this research project. In the next section, I share my personal experience and arrival to Accra, and my trajectory from working on planning projects to working with children and youth through collaborative spatial interventions with artists and creatives, which shifts my understanding of space and its possibilities in the city. Then, I share how collaboration, a mode of working together that I learn from these experiences in Accra, opens potential for new relations and friendships, and sets the course for the research collaboration with the child and youth-focused NGO Spread-Out Initiative in Nima, through which this research project is undertaken. Following that, I review literature on children and childhood, bodies and embodiment, and spatial experience. I use this literature to ground my understanding of how children spatially experience space in their

environments. I then move on to outline the research aims and questions for this project. Finally, I provide the structure for this thesis, describing the contribution of each chapter within this written work.

An introduction to Accra

I moved to Accra, Ghana in June 2010, a month after completing my masters studies in urban planning in the United States, where I grew up. My big career plan had been to relocate to Nigeria, where my family is from, yet on a whim, I followed another trajectory, taking up an internship researching a bus-rapid transit project stop at Kaneshie, one of the city's largest markets, and city plans to demolish street vendors' structures to make way for the transport initiative. When I finished that internship, I stayed on in Accra, taking up a research project opportunity with one of the city's former mayors to map heritage sites in one of the city's oldest neighborhoods. When that ended, I took a full-time job, and then another, a host of different experiences all focused on various aspects of urban heritage, space, and planning over a seven-year time span.

It is in my first few years in Accra, in between various jobs, gigs, and projects, that I find myself gravitating toward writing about the city, collaborations with community organizations, artists, and creatives, and working with children and youth. I first begin working with artists, children, and young people in Accra back in 2012, when a few friends of mine, artists, and creatives, develop an idea to organize a street art festival in Ga Mashie Jamestown, one of Accra's historic districts, but had no funding, only a big idea, artistic contacts, and a wide group of friends, to make it happen. Many in our large group of friends, which includes artists, creatives, writers and journalists, educators, entrepreneurs, architects, and designers, volunteer. I join and that first year, a group of us worked with community residents, children, and youth to transform a small open area that functioned as a daytime car park into a pop-up park for the area kids. The following year, the festival's success means it can grow a bit bigger, and a group of us assemble street furniture out of used car tires, paint, and power tools. A couple of years later, we design, map, and organize local tours taking festival goers through the neighborhood's history, which includes both early settlement and British colonial occupation. Each year, the festival grows a bit bigger, and it facilitates new connections and relations between those involved. For example, through this festival I connect with a youth-focused NGO in Jamestown, and in 2015 and 2016, we organize youth photography workshops and exhibitions with children and youth.

Upon reflection, I recognize these activities as collaborative processes in which we hone - and I learn - a necessary way of operating, building space and knowledge with others in the city of Accra. These experiences shape for me an understanding of interdependence and the knowledge that nothing was possible, or at least sustainable, individually. It is in our sharing resources and talents, lending favors, offering care, and tapping into our social relationships and networks that we can transform ideas into actions that may imprint, at least for a little while, on the city's landscape. In a context where each person has something to contribute but not nearly enough to do a project entirely on one's own, our collaborations and working together are an infrastructure that enable us to make things and ourselves happen in the city (Simone, 2004). This togetherness, or what Abdallah, a teenage boy from Nima, would later describe to me in an initial meeting as "hadin kai" (meaning "cooperation" in Hausa), is necessary for us to open spaces to do otherwise than what the dominant society and structures around us frames as expected or feasible.

When I began working in Accra several years ago, I relied on the design and governance frameworks that I had learned studying urban planning in the US to contextualize the everyday city around me. Working with these artists, children, and young people unsettled my own notions of planning and my conceptions of space. These collaborations fostered for me a learning of space as not just designed and built material sites, but as places through which the performance, negotiation, and encounter of everyday life are mediated (Quayson, 2014; De Certeau, 2011) and demonstrate the interrelation between the social and material. I quickly discovered that the social, political, economic, and physical constructs defining everyday life in the city's urban spaces far exceed the scope of planning and design tools meant to manage and guide "development" in the city. I was perplexed and intrigued by the fact that the dominant design frameworks that I was taught to rely on failed to capture and to explain the everyday world around me. While the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) certainly plans and delineates "public spaces," such as the gated Efua Sutherland Children's Park in the government ministries enclave, many more of the events and activities of public life take place at the street, sidewalk, and even in open spaces, like fields, empty car parks, in the paved spaces in front of buildings. In indigenous Ga neighborhoods like Ga Mashie, Teshie, and Kaneshie, residents close off the street as a place to hold funerals and religious gatherings. On Fridays and Saturdays, families set up roadblocks at the street and inside these closed-off spaces, they arrange tents, plastic chairs, and speaker systems for funeral ceremonies. In these same neighborhoods, the annual thanksgiving celebrations of Homowo employ streets as stage platforms for a range of activities: On one day, Ga leaders lead long throngs of processions with drummers, music, and dancers; on

another day, twin siblings are celebrated and parade through the streets carrying on their heads large metal bowls of offerings (Osei-Tutu, 2000). In other neighborhoods, young men take over car parks and open areas to play competitive football games. These realities of everyday life and the movements, interactions, and site-specific practices of urban residents challenge my own prevailing ideas of space and my role as a planner. Residents' transitional, ephemeral uses of spaces do not coincide with the fixedness of city plans, maps, and drawings, and these realities are missed from the city's present and future-oriented visions.

Being in collaboration

I undertake this doctoral research in collaboration with Spread-Out Initiative NGO and in particular, work closely with three team members: Larry Aminu, the NGO's founder, Fatimatu Mutari, who runs projects, and Mustapha, who runs communications and supports projects. Each of these three are involved somehow in the NGO's everyday activities. I situate this discussion of our collaboration in this introductory chapter, as it is our collaboration that opens, situates, and shapes this research project.



Image 2. Selfie photograph with SOI team members. Left to right: Victoria, Faisal, Mallam Mutawakil, Tikas, Larry, Fatimatu, and Mustapha (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

In my second semester (March-April 2018), I travel to Accra to explore collaboration opportunities with a wide range of friends and associates involved in art, education,

community development, with local NGOs, schools, and community-focused initiatives. One of these friends is Yussif Larry Aminu, a local artist whom I have known since 2013 when he founded Nima Muhinmanchi Art (NMA). “Nima Muhinmanchi Art” means the “importance of art in Nima” in Hausa, and NMA operated as a “collective of artists working to re-create spaces, perceptions, and societies through arts and culture” that worked with Nima children and adolescents through “learning experiences, public interventions, and intercultural dialogue to integrate urban development and artistic creation” (Nima Muhinmanchi Art, 2021). Over the span of three years, NMA produced a series of graffiti and wall artworks commissioned to beautify neighborhood homes, boundary walls, and public toilets, in collaboration with local artists and young people. In 2016, Larry founded Spread-Out Initiative (SOI), a youth-focused NGO that operates as an after-school and vocational training organization in his home neighborhood of Nima. Larry founded SOI “to support children and youth from diverse backgrounds to realize their potentials, and attain their dreams of a better future” through training, workshops, and skills development in art, literacy, digital technology, and entrepreneurship (Spread-Out Initiative, 2020). SOI has a history of experience working with international researchers in the Nima community, and SOI also collaborates with African and Diasporan interns, volunteers, and researchers to work with its students. Yussif Larry Aminu, SOI’s founder, explains:

“We are focused on creating opportunities within Africa and the Diaspora, to effect change so that our children can be themselves, govern themselves and can also see opportunities within Africa and the Diaspora rather than elsewhere. We are trying to collaborate with our sisters and brothers because we are all fighting the same fight.”¹

When I arrive to the NGO office, I meet Larry Aminu, Fatimatu Mutari, the office manager, and more than a dozen SOI students that Larry and Fatimatu were working with that afternoon. In between reading children’s stories with the SOI students, Larry, Fatimatu, and I discuss the NGO’s history of experiences collaborating with local and international researchers, the initial project focus on the SOI students’ experiences of space in Nima neighborhood, the potential for collaboration, our different visions for collaborative arrangements, potential research methods, as well as modes for sharing research learnings not just in

¹ This is a conversation that took place at the SOI office on July 10, 2019.

academic spaces but also with the community. Our discussion on the feasibility of working together traverses the opportunities and limitations for collaboration, a frank conversation on our respective positionalities, and how to build accountabilities into the research process. Larry and Fatimatu emphasize their ways of working with the children and youth, through a range of arts-based and literacy projects, including painting, drawing, photography, literacy, and story writing. These are also favorable coincidences that demonstrate an alignment in our interests. For example, in advance of the visit, I complete a three-day training in PhotoVoice (a participatory photography method), and it is this method Larry and his team members have used in the past to work with the SOI students and would like to use again in this research.

While I have worked and researched in other Accra neighborhoods, this research becomes my first experience conducting research in Nima, and this research collaboration is structured through my working together with three SOI team members: Yussif Larry Aminu, Fatimatu Mutari, and Mustapha Adamu. Nima is the location that grounds SOI's work, their experiences, and their community connections. While SOI's organizational location, operations, and accountabilities in Nima neighborhood ground the research in this location, so too with Larry and my friendship. This is an opportunity afforded through my years of friendship with Larry, and our shared interests and commitment to working with children and youth and intervening in space through artistic methods and practice. As an outsider in Nima (an aspect of my positionality that I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 4 on Methodology), this friendship expands and extends our accountabilities, and enables us to critically engage the "border of how and with whom knowledge is produced" (Chowdhury & Philipose, 2016, p. 21).

We agree that this research collaboration will operate as a partnership, with SOI serving as co-lead in the research, recognizing their history and work in their own community, established and positive rapport with neighborhood residents, and connections to local governance officials. Our collaboration takes the form of a partnership in which we use participatory and creative methods to engage with 17 SOI students so that these 17 children share and represent the ways that they experience community space in their everyday lives.

In our early discussions, we agree that we will attempt to operate differently from the conventional mode through which research is done, where the researcher is seen as the "expert" and the community is only a source of data. Instead, we agree to emphasize research as a relational process, where the research being

undertaken is known in the community, rather than an “undercover researcher” who operates without residents having an opportunity to air their views about the research. Additionally, we agree to find ways for residents to have access to the knowledge produced through the research, rather than a research process in which information is extracted from Nima residents, to end up (only) in university libraries or inaccessible academic journals or texts. Through working together, we will all know the outcomes of the research, and in addition, Nima residents can participate in the research, information is shared, and everyone learns through the process. As such, this research relationship becomes grounded in deep accountabilities of connection to the Nima neighborhood and its residents concerning how our knowledge is produced and shared (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 1999).

Fatimatu, Larry, Mustapha and I possess different lived experiences, identities, and positionalities, and we are all situated at our own intersections within the global network of colonial, capitalist, racial, ethnic, and patriarchal oppressions. I am an Igbo diasporan woman born in Flint, Michigan in the United States to Nigerian immigrants. My lived experience has been shaped largely by growing up in the United States and then living and working in Accra, Ghana over seven years and now presently in the UK, moving through the world as an Igbo diasporan woman, western-educated and from an immigrant, Christian, middle-class family. Fatimatu, Larry, and Mustapha are Ghanaians born and raised in Accra, Ghana, with their lived experience in the global majority context of Accra. Larry, who founded Spread-Out Initiative and whom I have known for many years, in his late 30s, was born and raised in Nima neighborhood and grew up in a Muslim family and completed his education, including studying at the University of Ghana. Mustapha, in his mid-20s, was born and raised in Nima neighborhood, has grown up in Muslim families and completed his education at an Islamic university in Accra. Fatimatu, also in her mid-20s, was raised in a nearby neighborhood, and in a Muslim family, is currently completing her education. They move through the world as descendants of migrants from northern Ghana to Accra, educated at university, technical, and vocational schools, and raised in Muslim, working-class families.

I opened this thesis with the scene of adolescent boys playing football that I noticed when I was in Nima, and I made connections to my longer experience living and working in Accra and forming collaborations with artists and creatives, from which emerged my interest and moments working with children and youth on various spatial interventions. These were moments of talking, walking, photographing, building, meandering, noticing, laughing, playing, and designing with artists and children while intervening in urban space through creative activities, and with

children, visually documenting these and their other urban experiences. These experiences operate through friendships and produce new relations, including facilitating this research collaboration with Spread-Out Initiative, a collaboration grounded in shared interest in creatively exploring children's spatial experiences. In the following section, I make my way through bodies of relevant literature on children and childhood, embodiment, and space, which serves as a means of building relation between my experiences from these spatial practices, the focus of this research, and existing academic scholarship also focused on this topic.

Reviewing the literature: African urban space, children, and their embodied experiences

Changing notions of space in African contexts

I begin with a focus on the changing notions of space within the African context. Here I focus on the indigenous conceptions of shared space as ephemeral, fluid, and communally oriented, and the constraints imposed through colonial design and planning in the colonial African city (Njoh, 2007; Mbembe, 2003). Working through scholarship, I recognize how the racial project of colonialism, part of the global project of European empire making, has had an enduring impact on these spatial designs, aesthetics and relations (Moshood, 2019). I pay critical attention to shifting local realities, including problematizing the westernized concept of public space, and I explore the tensions concerning how these spaces are dominantly designed and popularly used in the contemporary moment, with implications for this research project.

Historically, open spaces and communal spaces were central to everyday community life in African settlements. In traditional African settlements, communally shared areas were central, open, and host to the lived experience of myriad usages and events. Some were spaces of engagement and encounter, where a single, centrally located open space hosted alternating activities, such as market trading, cultural performances, state functions and proclamations. Some communal spaces were spaces for collective or individual resources. Open spaces were found in front of the homes of local chiefs, and within the homes of extended families, where they could be easily protected. These commons spaces also served as sites for religious rituals, gatherings, prayers, and celebrations (Osei-Tutu, 2000). At the homes of the local chiefs, open spaces were also the sites for periodic markets, durbars, public executions, and religious rituals. In these cases, situating community activities in proximity to local leadership enabled security, community building, and shared identity (Ozo, 2009; Amankwah-Ayeh, 1996). Family compounds were also designed with their own private, communal spaces. Open spaces for gatherings

were intimately linked to the home and in the rest of the community, at the center of indigenous approaches to human settlements (Amarteifio, 2015).

As platforms for shifting and revolving activities such as commercial markets, political gatherings, processions, and celebrations, these usages reinforced community-building, heritage and identity (Amankwah-Ayeh, 1996). In the context of Sokoto and Zaria (both located in present-day northern Nigeria), public squares were popular spaces for communal prayer, and the city's market and religious spaces were co-located with the palace in the center of the city (Garba, 2010). In Kumasi (present-day central Ghana), the centrally located royal plazas and markets were sites for celebrational, political and commercial functions, such as a royal courthouse, military parade ground, and reception for distinguished visitors, and the well-known central market (Asante & Helbrecht, 2020; Schmidt, 2005), blending together state and popular uses into one principal space (Amankwah-Ayeh, 1996). The practice of commercial vending, which took place on approved market days, produced a centrally located, temporal and recurring open-air market. The open area, absent of fixed, permanent structures such as market sheds or vendor stalls, enabled the flexible usage of the space; vendors used portable wooden implements or sat on the ground to claim their areas for trading (Wilks, 1975).

Further, research on indigenous conceptions, occupancy, and usage of land both center demonstrate the centuries-long knowledge and application of indigenous African indigenous spatial design and usage (Chirikure, 2020; Sackeyfio, 2012). In the indigenous Ga settlements that pre-dated Accra, inhabitants' spatial practices and usage demonstrates how individual community members and groups could access and use stool² or family lands with permission or if unattended. This even included strangers, that is, those who came from other peoples or settlements, who could take up unused lands to make their own shelters and commerce. Chirikure (2020) and Sackeyfio (20212) also underline the important of indigenous authorities in not only the allocation of land, but also different forms of regulation and control over various land uses, including residential, farming, and communal spaces.

² In southern Ghana, indigenous authorities are often referred to as "stools." The stool is "the seat of a chief of an indigenous state (sometimes of a head of family) which represents the source of authority of the chief (or head of family). It is a symbol of unity and its responsibilities devolve upon its living representatives, the chief and his councillors" (Kasanga & Kotey, 2001, p. 13). The lands these indigenous authorities oversee are called stool lands.

The racial projects of colonialism in Ghana introduced dominant conceptions of space linked to westernized modernity. Colonial planning, architecture, and design were tools employed to socially and spatially construct racial difference, beginning with the colonial plantation as the “blueprint for future sites of racial entanglement” (McKittrick, 2011, p. 949). Across its global iterations, the colonial project operated through:

“The production of boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves; the subversion of existing property arrangements; the classification of people according to different categories; resource extraction; and, finally, the manufacturing of a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 25)

In African cities, the colonial history of planning and architecture is a white European colonial rationality of conceiving, designing, and planning the city, grounded in extractivist, colonial, and Eurocentric principles and understandings of space, and imposed onto local African lives, experiences, and spatiality (Moshood, 2019; Watson, 2014). Colonial architecture and planning constructed and projected racial differences onto bodies and urban form. Colonial architects and planners’ spatial logics, derived from European conceptions of space, place, and lived experience, negated existing and local inhabitation, practices, and ways of life as ungeographic, and imposed city structures, plans, and architectures (Fry & Drew, 1964). As part of a pattern in colonized cities, colonial planners divided colonial Accra into a European town and administration area, a European residential area, and native town (Grant & Yankson, 2003; Parker, 2000). Zoning, building codes, racial segregation, and the design of large bungalow homes surrounded by green spaces and parks and located in proximity to exclusive social services (including the European-only Ridge Hospital) were employed to create a “European feel or atmosphere” for Europeans in an African colonized space (Pierre, 2013, p. 26). These European quarters of the colonial city reflected the aesthetics of upper and middle-class neighborhoods in European cities, with government-provisioned water, sewerage and later, electricity, telephones, and other amenities, and with access to green recreational facilities. The colonial administration deliberately created a “white city” of European and non-African residence, commercial, and recreational space, in contrast with the “native” African quarters, which were generally left to self-provision their own housing, infrastructure and services. Through this process, colonial design and planning created a (white) European urban spatial design, aesthetic, and experience in deep contrast with the (indigenous) Black African sense of place for the African colonial subject:

“The colonized’s sector, or at least the ‘native’ quarters, the shanty town, the Medina, the reservation, is a disreputable place inhabited by disreputable people. You are born anywhere, anyhow. You die anywhere, from anything. It’s a world with no space, people are piled on top of the other, the shacks squeezed tightly together...This compartmentalized world [The European town separate from the native town], this world divided in two, is inhabited by different species. The singularity of the colonial context lies in the fact that economic reality, inequality, and enormous disparities in lifestyles never manage to mask the human reality...it is clear that what divides this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to.” (Fanon, 2004, pp. 4-5).

The origins of public spaces in African cities are in colonial administrators’ design and usage of open spaces, including green belts, landscaped gardens, and recreation grounds as segregating spatial interventions that formed part of an architecture of control (Bigon, 2008, 2013). Racial spatial segregation, through the design of European-only residential enclaves, was a universal practice across British colonial cities in West Africa, predicated on health and hygiene concerns for the British colonial officers and their families (Beeckmans, 2013; Njoh, 2007). For example, Ebenezer Howard’s garden city model was a strategy to comfortably house upper-class white Europeans in colonial African cities while keeping indigenous Africans outside of them by using “sanitation belts,” vast green spaces ranging between 300 to 800 meters wide, as a design intervention to separate Europeans from native residential areas with mosquitos carrying malaria (Beeckmans, 2013; Njoh, 2007). These sanitation belts were “building free zones,” open spaces restricted to Europeans’ usage and were designed as golf courses, race courses, cricket and football grounds. They served dual purposes: They provided recreation and leisure spaces to the white European population, and they also “enforced racial boundaries and minimized ‘racial pollution’” (Bush, 1999, p. 76). These recreational and leisure spaces were part of many urban spaces closed off to African inhabitants of colonial cities, and in this case produced an enduring pattern in the control, regulation, and exclusion of urban inhabitants’ access to public space.

Many African countries still use planning legislation based in European planning laws, policies, and structures, reinforcing and entrenching colonial spatial planning, land management, and design, and reproducing spatial inequalities (Beeckmans & Bigon, 2016; Watson, 2014). This scholarship tracing indigenous orientations to

shared space and the interruption of colonial design and planning demonstrate for me the importance of problematizing and moving away from the notion of public space in post-independent African cities. As such, it is while undertaking this research that I shift from using the term public space to moving toward the use of “community space,” as a small means of distinguishing the westernized theorizations of public space in urban African contexts and to emphasize the fluid, ever-evolving nature of community spaces in the histories of African urban settlements, following Garba (2010) and Chibana (2018). I consider the “West” as a “historical, not a geographical construct...a society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capital, secular, and modern...[as a] result of a specific set of historical processes – economic, political, social, and cultural” and as a way of seeing the world tied to aspirations for these westernized standards and ways of living (Hall, 2018, p. 186). Further, the West is also continually centered through long traditions of epistemic privilege resulting from colonial subjugations and the continued realities of coloniality (Grosfoguel, 2013). This manifests, for example, in the westernized orientations of public space made dominant in African contexts through conceptualization and planning (Amoako & Adom-Asamoah, 2019; Arku, Yeboah, & Nyantakyi-Frimpong, 2016; Schmidt, 2005).

Locating African children within children’s geographies

This research project engages African children who overall, constitute a large and growing segment of urban populations. Here I am employing the global measurement that frames all individuals under the age of 18 years as a child (United Nations 2021), however I also recognize that in many African societies, this threshold is less fixed. For example, Twum-Danso Imoh (2019) contends that a recognition solely on the globally fixed “chronological age” of 18 years misses how in fact, in many local African contexts, older generations continue to use social indicators - getting a job, getting married, having a child - as the real “social age” that more truly distinguishes children from adults.³ These social indicators in individual growth also represent the child’s ascending status in their journey to becoming full members into society. Middle and upper childhood mark children’s emerging move toward greater independence, where these individuals are increasingly able to move within an expanded territory, assert themselves, while still being largely disciplined through the expectations, limitations, and controls defined

³ In this research project, because all of the SOI students involved in this research project were under the age of 18 years during our time together, and none of the SOI students were primarily engaged in work, nor married, nor had children, I consider them children both in the local sense and global policy sense.

for them by their guardians and wider society (Jones & Cunningham, 1999). Children's widening space of activity into expanded territory corresponds with new encounters, expanding and making more complex their social networks. These new relations with each other further enable their reduced dependence on adults (Coffey, Watson, & Campus, 2015).

A large body of scholarship on African childhoods has emerged around and tended toward children's experiences of marginalization, violence, criminality, and delinquency in the city. African children and young people are framed as "simultaneously victims and agents" (Diouf, 2003, p. 5), as "both makers and breakers of society" (De Boeck & Honwana, 2005, p. 2) who by and large live in marginalizing economic and political conditions that "offer few opportunities" (De Boeck & Honwana, 2005, p. 4). In a review of children's geographies scholarship in Sub-Saharan African countries, Prats Ferret (2011) found that research themes were largely focused on violence and war, work, health, and healthcare (particularly with regards to HIV/AIDS, and hygiene) and by focusing on children's deficits, vulnerabilities, and the shortcomings in their environment, offering a vision of African childhoods as an experience of victimization and responses to their victimhood. These experiences are evidenced in the wide scholarship on, for example, street children who are compelled by poverty, health crises, and political instability into begging, stealing, hustling, and other forms of subsistence living (Shand, 2018; Yankson & Bertrand, 2012; Young & Barrett, 2001).

I want to briefly distinguish here between African children and youth (youth are often framed as up to 25 years of age), whose increasing presence in the public sphere Diouf (2003) links to their exclusions from power and authority, employment, educational opportunity. As he asserts, this produces a growing youth presence deeply associated with violence and criminality, presenting dangers and uncontrollable threats to other members of society (Diouf, 2003). This scholarship speaks through the lens of difficult African political change and conflict in postcolonial culture, producing precarity and marginalizing circumstances for both children and youth. The questions that drive these areas of research scholarship hover around their lived experiences in the context of political crises, economic deprivation, and lack of social safety nets that would prevent their smooth progression from childhood and adolescence into adulthood, coined as "waitthood" (Honwana, 2012).

As indicated by the scene I used to introduce this chapter, African children play. However, in contrast to scholarship on children's geographies in the global north,

there is scarce work dealing with African children's everyday lives, particularly on their free time, play, experiences on and reflections of their environment, and their own prospects for their futures (Prats Ferret, 2011). Meanwhile, fantasy, imagining, and play are widely held as an expected aspect of childhood (von Benzon, 2015; Russ & Dillon, 2011). Although global, it is particularly in the global north where scholarship on children's role-playing, pretending, games, and other forms of play demonstrates the unboundedness of children's imaginations as a serious area of study (Whitebread & O'Sullivan, 2012). As a situated and technical practice in the moment, play holds productive potential for performative, potentially even radical practices that playfully resist, subvert, or create around the social limitations and boundaries placed by older individuals, including adults (Thomson, 2005). The scholarly trends demonstrate opportunities for researching expansively with children to explore their rich inner worlds of fantasy, speculating, and imagining, in addition to the continued importance of creating space for them to vocalize their own lived experiences. However, the evolution and value in research scholarship placed on this and other aspects of children's play in African contexts is still largely left underexplored and undertheorized (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2016; Ogunyemi and Henning, 2020). Within this existing research on children's studies and geographies, the call for expanding our research focus and adjusting our epistemological and conceptual frames to better account for children's everyday realities to specifically attend to the everyday realities of race in children's lives (Konstantoni & Emejulu, 2017). Accordingly, scholars also call for us to make relational connections between the local and global processes that shape children and youths' lives (Imoh, 2019).

Embodied children's geographies

We all have bodies, which serve as the interface for our experiencing and doing in the world. Here I understand the "body" as

"a concrete, material, animate organization of flesh, organs, nerves, and skeletal structure, which are given a unity, cohesiveness, and form through the psychical and social inscription of the body's surface. The body is, so to speak, organically, biologically 'incomplete'; it is indeterminate, amorphous, a series of uncoordinated potentialities that require social triggering, ordering, and long-term 'administration'. The body becomes a human body, a body that coincides with the 'shape' and space of a psyche, a body that defines the limits of experience and subjectivity only through the intervention of the (m)other and, ultimately, the Other (the language - and rule-governed social order)." (Grosz, 1999)

This corporeality is the material condition for our subjective experience (Grosz, 1993, 1999), and the body is the locus for this subjectivity and the site of power relations, and these relations are always located in time and space (Oldfield, Salo, & Schlyter, 2009; Salo, 2009; Price & Shildrick, 1999). In the spatial context, body and space mutually constitute one another; the city socially produces corporeality as the context and locational coordinates for the body, in the ways it brings together unrelated bodies, and as a material and social environment in which our corporeality is continually produced (Grosz, 1999, p. 382). Every aspect of our lives is thus embodied – we take place in the world *through* our bodies: “Everything we do we do with our bodies - when we think, speak, listen, sleep, eat sleep, walk, relax, work and play - we ‘use’ our bodies” (Nettleton and Watson, 1998, p. 1).

I first encountered scholarship on bodies and embodiment through writings on Black and racialized embodiment and the corporeal body as a site of lived racialized subjectivity (Threadcraft, 2016; Ahmed, 2002; Fanon, 1986). For Fanon (1986), the Black individual embodies both a deep “historico-racial schema” and the superficial “body schema,” both of which are more-than-ontological lived realities of Black being. The former is “woven...out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories” (Fanon, 1986, p. 111) as a socially and historically constructed understanding of self. As Fanon elaborates, it is from the site of one’s corporeal body that one experiences consciousness, encounters affective atmospheres, holds “implicit knowledge,” perceives and senses materials, experiences desires, and moves into action to satiate desires through bodily movements. All these cumulatively shape the Black individual, their experience, the world, and this individual’s relation with the world. As Fanon asserts, his own body is slowly assembled in both space and time through a “definitive structuring of my self and the world - definitive because it creates a genuine dialectic between my body and the world” (Fanon, 1986, p. 91). The body, rather than a discrete, material body, is deeply in relation with the world. It is also our source of curiosity of that world and our being within it (“O my body,” Fanon writes, “make of me always a man who questions!” (Fanon, 1986, p. 232), and the site of our speculation and imagining (p. 229).

These body politics illuminate our struggles over the degree of individual or social control over our bodies, as well as the everyday societal practices, policies, and relations through which our bodies are regulated, surveilled, and disciplined in space. These politics are at play in multiple scales, including in our homes, in community and urban spaces, in neighborhoods, as well as in other arenas, as well as the ways in which our bodies are disciplined in how we present, move, and exist. Embodiment serves as an integrated approach to the wrapped-upness of the

corporeal body with the mind, spirit, senses and emotions, and relational encounters with others and the world as one moves, thinks, feels, and does. In particular, this emphasis on what the body *does* shifts the conceptual focus from simply *having* a body to *being* and *doing* a body, which enables us to perceive the ways in which identity and practice are part of the constitution of oneself and potential (Ellingson 2017, p. 13). Specifically,

“the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant *materializing* of possibilities, One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one’s body and, indeed, one does one’s body differently from one’s contemporaries and from one’s embodied predecessors and successors as well...As an intentionally organized materiality, the body is always an embodying of possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention” (Butler, 1988, p. 521, emphasis in original).

Having discussed both childhood and embodiment, I want to briefly reflect on the connections between these two bodies of scholarship by considering how children embody childhood. This enables me to attend to the corporeal focus on their practice, performance, and movement (Spatz 2015), particularly for playing and imagining, and as place of building and speaking from situated knowledge (Joseph and Bell 2020). So, it is through this lens of embodiment that I am able to attend to the body and embodied experience in order to recognize the body as an enfolded source of knowledge, a site of analysis, and to forefront our understanding of how bodies exist, interact with, and also shape the world.

Academic scholarship on children and their lifeworlds in African cities has explored them and their experiences as schooling beings, (un)healthy beings, economically active beings, at-risk or already troublesome beings, in contexts of the multiple vulnerabilities and various structures of marginalization that many children navigate. In the introductory scene for this thesis, I recognize these children as (also) playing, socializing, and imagining beings. I read these embodied practices such as creativity, opportunity and temporality that are part of tactical activities (De Certeau 1994). Research on children at play demonstrates expansive ideas for thinking through and understanding children’s embodiment (Cortés-Morales, 2020; Horton & Kraftl, 2018; Procter & Hackett, 2017). For example, children’s time and activities of play hold an important role in shaping their awareness of themselves in the world: “Through play comes increased self-awareness, realization of the dynamic nature of relationships with others and the natural world, and an understanding of the position of the child among peers (Jones & Cunningham, 1999, p. 29). Play is also a

source of fun, pleasure, competition and challenge, freedom, and imaginative creation, possible in a wide range of environments and spaces: “Children will play anywhere, but not all play environments provide the same quality of experience” (Jones & Cunningham, 1999, p. 30).

All these experiences, shifting conceptualizations of children and childhood, and their bodily experiences understood through embodiment, take place within a shifting context of space. Here I bring in a focus on space - not on space as material, but rather on the ephemeral and embodied experiences of space, the spatial practices that take place in space, the emotions, feelings that are held in space, and the practices and performances that take place in space and take up space. The practice of inhabiting, claiming, and controlling space not only shapes space, but it is also means to construct or contest social identities (Langevang, 2008; Massey, 2005). In research on gathering places in Accra’s Madina neighborhood, Langevang (2008) found that young boys and male youth produced social hangout spots called “bases” as sites of social gathering. In the Tanzanian context, “the motility of the speakers’ bodies” and “sitting down for conversation” (Weiss, 2004, p. 215) were elemental ingredients in the production of place. In Nima, Cassiman (2018) found that the physical “bases” that these young men claim as gathering sites are “nuclei of unconditional loyalty and care” where residents, mostly men, sit outside together at benches and chat, debate politics, listen to music, and otherwise entertain themselves in a process of enacting new “vocabularies and practices of friendship” (Cassiman, 2018, p. 74). From these friendships, recreational football teams, political alliances and engagements are formed (Cassiman, 2018). In another context, coming together around certain themes, particularly the male-dominated sport of football, also informs ways that young people, particularly young boys as well as young men, find new ways to inhabit space. For example, (Omotosho, 2012) explores how young people transformed three local cinema halls into social gathering spaces to watch televised football matches in Ado Ekiti, Nigeria. In the time and location of their gatherings, the young people produce a shared emotional space of laughter, silliness, happiness, and lament, “making fun of themselves, talking about politics and keeping themselves happy while waiting for a match to start or after the end of a match... [in a] sitting arrangement reflecting the way club fans wanted to share both sorrows and joy together” (p. 178).

Literature points to children (and youths’) experiences of place as not only embodied, sensory, and emotional, but more than adults’ experiences. For example, Christensen & O’Brien (2003) distinguish between the abstract,

representational renders of space and spatial knowledge centered by adults and children's own emplaced knowledge, which is "the[ir] understanding that emerges from embodied movement through place" (p. 16). Hackett, Procter, & Kummerfeld (2018) point to this embodied movement as critical to the ways children go on to build meanings, and memories, and then attach them to places over time, and they emphasize attention to this aspect of childhood embodied experience as central to our understandings of children's experiences of place.

In literature review, I connect my personal observations and experiences to academic scholarship, and I set up this research and its attention to the changing notion of space in African urban contexts, children's geographies, and embodiment. I highlight the enduring tensions between indigenous modes of spatial relation and practice, with its inclusion of ephemeral spatial practices, and the settled mode of westernized colonial spatial planning, which is reproduced in post-independent planning. Through the literature on children's geographies explores how children, particularly in the African context, I problematize the dominant scholarship that frames children as largely precarious and marginalized. I also note this opens up an opportunity for this research, in an orientation to children's recreation and play, to facilitate new and expanded understandings of children's geographies in this context. Finally, the literature on embodiment sets up our attention in this research on children's corporeal experiences of space through their emotional and felt experiences and their spatial practices as means as an ever-evolving relation with their environment. These bodies of scholarship together inform the research aims, objectives, and questions that guide this research project.

Research aims, objectives, and questions

In the previous sections, I have outlined the inspirations, experiences, collaborative connections, and trajectories that inform this doctoral research, and I have worked through relevant scholarship to identify possibilities and new orientations for this research. Through this thesis, I hold together the wide set of lived experiences that children have in community spaces along with their creative ability to think and do otherwise in the constrained circumstances they might find themselves. Specifically, I question and explore how children's spatial experiences take place within the ever-emerging context of community space and how they might imagine geographic possibilities from their spatial practices and experiences. This brings me to the key aims, objectives, and questions for this thesis, which orient this scholarly work toward building more expansive understandings of children's embodied experiences of community space by drawing on collaborative thinking and doing that attends to race and colonial histories and afterlives.

I approach this thesis with three research aims:

- Enacting a Black feminist research praxis that open new spaces of knowledge production.
- Working toward a more expansive understanding of Black African children and their experiences in community space.
- Conceptualizing children's contemporary community space experiences in Nima within a global Black geographies scope.

To achieve these research aims, I specify the following research objectives:

- Working through collaboration with Spread-Out Initiative team members and students to design methods, gather information, and make meaning of our learnings
- Co-producing arts-based methods in which children elaborate their own spatial practices and experiences in community space
- Attending to embodied difference and the local understandings and discourses that children and community residents use to understand and critique their own experiences.
- Critically narrativizing children's experiences as Black experiences imbued with memory and meaning and happening in relation with projects of racial slavery, colonialism, and imperialism.

I work toward these above aims and objectives using the following research questions:

- RQ1** How do children articulate their everyday embodied experiences of community space in Nima?
- RQ2** How do children in their practices of inhabiting community space in Nima practice, perform, and imagine other ways of being and doing outside of dominant spatial frames?

Thesis structure

In this thesis, structured into six chapters, I argue for learning the ways community space is made, unmade, and remade in the Nima neighborhood through the everyday embodied knowledge and experiences of children. As I discuss in this chapter (**Chapter 1**), the work that I do in this thesis is two-fold: First, in my practice of recognizing local situated knowledges as valid contributions to this research, I conscientiously work between local and academic theorizing as an epistemological process toward conceptualizing and understanding the world of Nima. Then, through collaborative processes, I work at asking and coming to answer particular

research questions, and these questions orient around community space, children, embodiment, and spatial experience.

In the following chapter (**Chapter 2**), I present semi-structured interviews with Nima and Accra elders as conversational narratives in a deliberate practice of foregrounding residents' oral histories of their neighborhood. Making clear my discomfort with conventional approaches of providing background context in urban studies, I instead choose to work with elder residents' stories of their own lived experiences and situated knowledge from Nima. I demonstrate our conversations as learning experiences, in which they enable me to read Nima within a wider global context of diasporic migrations and relations, plus a local landscape of everyday spatial logics, politics and relations. Here my role as participant is in asking questions and sharing my own thoughts during our conversations, working through the knowledge they offer, considering the stories they share critically from the sociopolitical positions they inhabit, and then in writing in such a way that locates myself within these encounters. These conversations reveal Nima as an emerging location, where through founding, growth, evolution, and intense densification, becomes a populated urban district. This chapter therefore provides local understandings of Nima's "spatial formation," in the words of Accra's former mayor, to contextualize the wide array of spatial occupations and spatial usages employed by residents in the everyday unfolding of community space - or simply, they share how space works in Nima.

In **Chapter 3**, I outline the conceptual framework for this thesis, pointing to the significance of our collaboration in shaping the framework for this thesis. Drawing on my Black feminist epistemological foundations to center situated knowledge and relationality, I devote space to one particularly meaningful porch conversation with Larry, Mustapha, and Fatimatu. This conversation, which I present in the format of long-form transcription, serves as meaningful material, critical, and conceptual site from which we produce lines of thinking that I connect to academic scholarship. I weave a framework that connects our ideas to academic scholarship on Blackness in Ghana, the othering of Black peoples in a world structured by our less-than-human status, and a relational understanding of community space experience through the notion of the uninhabitable and the theory of racializing assemblages. This framework provides conceptual tools for analyzing and discussing the experiences of embodied subjection, as well as comprehending alternative modes of life.

In **Chapter 4**, I describe the methodological process of this research project, focusing on the collaborative planning of and undertaking of participatory arts-based workshops and a site-specific intervention (community event) with 17 SOI students. I describe our shared and individual roles in designing and conducting these activities, which align with the SOI's ongoing creative practice with children and young people. I relate the structure, details, and ethical considerations of our activities, and the implications for these methodological decisions for the knowledge production process. I detail our collaborative approach and our methodological decisions, from recruitment of students, structuring and facilitating workshops, reflecting on these research encounters, and then producing our collaborative data analysis workshop with the SOI students and focused on the materials they had produced. I also outline my writing process in producing this thesis.

In **Chapter 5**, I explore the SOI students' experiences of community space as processes of assemblage, and I work through four distinct assemblages that emerge from our collaborative analysis process that the SOI team members and I facilitate with the SOI students. I organize this chapter into five parts, with the first four parts led by an introduction of the SOI student authors, their story, and my subsequent discussion of our learnings and connections to theory. I close this chapter with an extensive discussion section that explores the connections between these four assemblages in order to critically respond to the research questions.

In the conclusion (**Chapter 6**), I summarize my argument on the ways that community space emerges from children's own experiences of displacement and marginalization, their navigation of power dynamics, and inventive methods toward imagining and using space otherwise. I draw together the wide range of learnings from this thesis to outline the major research contributions in expanding understandings of Black African children and their worlds, creating a Black feminist knowledge project, and situating Nima within a global Black geographic frame. I then turn toward the future directions that can emerge from this project, and I close with a reflection on the value of this project in creating space for Black voices and thought in the fields of geography and urban studies.

Conversations on Nima's background (hi)stories

In this chapter, I foreground five interview conversations with elders (including political authorities) who share (hi)stories of Nima neighborhood and the city of Accra. This is an empirically based chapter, in which the interviewees, in sharing their lived experiences, situated knowledges, and subjective perspectives, provide background information that places the neighborhood in context for this research study. Each of these conversations contextualize Nima as a place deeply enmeshed in historical and contemporary migrations, spatial transformations, economic and spatial complexities. Through these conversational narratives, I position Accra more generally and Nima within global and local forces, connections, and practices that shape contemporary space and spatial relations.

Forefronting these conversations is my deliberate move away from the conventional structure of an urban studies and planning doctoral thesis and its customary academic background context section on research location. In this such section, researchers and scholars commonly begin by describing Nima as a “migrant” neighborhood, a “poor community,” an economically and infrastructurally deprived district, a “slum,” among other labels to describe the neighborhood’s existing conditions (Paller, 2019; Aggrey-Korsah & Oppong, 2013; Nyametso, 2012; Owusu, Agyei-Mensah, & Lund, 2008; Brand, 1972; Hart, 1970). For example, Aggrey-Korsah and Oppong (2013 p. 112), in their research on “urban slum health” in Nima, employ the following description:

“The study area of Nima-Maamobi is a poor community located within the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA)...According to the AMA, Nima-Maamobi is a third class residential area (AMA 2011a, b) which is characterized by poor sanitation, poor access to safe water, and dilapidated housing. For example, an estimated 30 people share a toilet, 48 people share a kitchen, and 22 people share a bathroom. Also about 18% of the people do not have access to toilet facilities (AMA 2011b). In contrast, first class residential areas have excellent infrastructure and other amenities and are not densely populated. Examples include Airport Residential Area, Cantonments, East Legon, Labone, Ridge and Roman Ridge (Arku et al. 2011). Nima-Maamobi had a population of 117,000 as of the 2000 census and although local level data are not yet available from the 2010 census, it is estimated that the

community now has a population of about 150,000 people living on a land size of about 6 km² with extremely high population densities (Hip-Ghana 2011). The high population density and shortage of sleeping space has resulted in the conversion of non-sleeping facilities into sleeping rooms. Sewers are mostly open, and most residents obtain potable water through private, commercial sources, or by tapping into pipes that do not enter the household. Poverty is so dire that the people cannot protect themselves from insults from the environment within which they live.”

These depictions, which operate from the “neutral” standpoint of academic scholarship, discipline, and descriptive statistics, take Black dehumanization and social death, the condition of not being accepted as fully human, as epistemological starting point (McKittrick, 2021; Tamale, 2020; Sithole, 2019). Further, these depictions also reproduce colonial categories and frames, keeping us ensnared in the academic knowledge project of empire, where “black humanity is unthinkable” (McKittrick, 2021, p. 45; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). From this “neutral” contextual framing, the wide gamut of residents’ self-organized spatial practices, ranging from constructing shelter, livelihoods, and social space, exist outside the “benefit of physical planning” (Yankson & Bertrand, 2012, p. 33) provided by colonial and post-independent administrations. These descriptions operate as contextual jumping-off points of what has, indisputably, “gone wrong” (Agyei-Mensah & Owusu, 2012, p. 138). These descriptions locate Nima as existentially out-of-sync and out-of-place with Accra’s expected unilinear development trajectory and therefore in need of this course correction (Brady & Hooper, 2019). This is a development trajectory and envisaged course correction that is deeply intertwined with Eurocentric urban modernity through the colonial and post-independent project (Amoo-Adare, 2019; Moshood, 2019; Pierre, 2013). This approach of setting up Nima as a problem (as a neighborhood with problems) also sets up the research endeavor to seek out an empirical affirmation of this framing and/or solve these identified problems along the unilinear trajectory. It tends to foreclose any necessary questioning concerning how we come to understand the background of place, and any other starting points, places, relations, scopes, factors, timelines, and realities of this place, which might enable other lines of thinking, researching, and understanding this location. In line with this, the warning (McKittrick, 2021, p. 45):

“Description is not liberation...Indeed, so trusted and commonsense are studies that begin with black dehumanization and/or social death and accompanying methods of proving

abjection or saving the objectified figure that any burst of rebellion against that assigned place is almost (not totally) obliterated.”

In this doctoral thesis, I experiment with writing a humanizing scholarly project, and I begin this practice at the beginning. Larry’s guidance was we initiate this project with me first developing a grounded understanding of the neighborhood through the voices of elders who are intimately acquainted with Nima through lived experience. This is an African indigenous research approach, where “elders are important as libraries in providing knowledge about a phenomenon. Consultation of elders is vital,” particularly as a starting point in the research process (Chilisa, 2012, p. 123). In writing this thesis and again starting with these conversations with elders, I also move away from “Eurocentric scholarly hegemony [which] venerates detachment and abstraction,” and I employ a writing practice where local residents’ “standpoints, epistemes, perspectives, and experiences...are honored, foregrounded, and valued” (Carlson, 2017, p. 497 and p. 501). This includes acknowledging these orally transmit[ed] histories and stories as scholarly sources (Carlson, 2017; Smith, 1999) and necessary background context for an understanding of Nima’s history and contemporary situation. Further, grounding this background chapter with elders’ own stories and our interactive conversations foregoes the “descriptive story that corresponds with our existing system of knowledge, one that has already posited blackness and black sense of place as dead and dying” (McKittrick, 2021, p. 149). Instead, our conversations describe Nima’s ever-emerging realities, made detailed and complex within each individual conversation as well as between these conversations.

In this process, Larry, Mustapha, and Fatimatu initially identified elders in the community that it would be important to speak with based on the topic of our research (purposive sampling); Larry and I completed most of these interviews. In some cases, these individuals also recommended other individuals to interview (snowballing). I also identified an additional city authority for the four of us meet and interview as a group (purposive sampling). Each interview was conducted as a semi-structured conversation where Larry, Fati, Mustapha and I agreed to points of discussion beforehand that shaped the interview questions. In each instance, we went to the interviewee’s home or place or work to conduct the interview. Before commencing with the interview with everyone, we explained the research topic, the purpose for the interview, and we shared the information sheet and consent form (see Appendix). I audio recorded each interview and then later transcribed the interviews into texts, in addition to writing reflections, thoughts, and describing the experience in a reflective diary. Interviewees were asked to choose a pseudonym or

whether they would like to use their real names in the research outputs, and I used this information to label each audio file, transcript, and in this thesis. These semi-structured interviews lasted between 30 minutes to two hours, depending on the individual's availability and the depth of the interview. With two individuals, we returned for subsequent follow-up interviews.

Table 1. List of Interviewees

Interviewee ⁴	Interviewers	Scope of Discussions
Mr. Abdullahi Ibrahim Baro (Community elder)	Larry and Victoria	He provide a history of Nima (mid 1930s to present) on the evolution community spaces in context of neighborhood development and growth
Chief Nii Futa (Chief of Nima)	Larry and Victoria	He provides a history of Nima from his position as local authority
Hon. Shareau Tajudeen (Former Member of Parliament, Ayawaso East)	Larry and Victoria	He provides a political authority vision for shaping urban space in Nima; current challenges and opportunities
Hajia Mariam Salifu (Community elder)	Larry and Victoria	She provides perspective on the experiences of children and women using community spaces in Nima, and the various interventions to support women
Madame Abiba Suleiman (Community elder)	Larry and Victoria	She provides perspective on the experiences of women using community spaces in Nima
Mr. Nat Nuno Amarteifio (Former Accra mayor and historian of the city of Accra)	Larry, Fati, Mustapha, and Victoria	He provides historical context of Accra's urban development, centering Accra's histories of migration, local and global connections

⁴ All individuals consented to the use of their real names as they appear here.

Mr. Baba Yakubu Mahama (Planning Director for Ayawaso East)	Larry and Victoria	He provides context on city planning approaches and priorities
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Because of space limitations, I include only five semi-structured conversations in this chapter. I present these as they took place, as conversational encounters between these individuals, Larry, and with one interview, also including Fatimatu and Mustapha. These individuals each speak from their different positions, lending subjective perspectives that layer, overlap, and diverge, and in each instance are drawn from an everyday lived experience and knowing of their own neighborhood and city, and indicating the different, and perhaps multiple, ways of knowing these places. These conversations contextualize Nima within Accra's evolution from a network of coastal indigenous Ga settlements to colonial and then post-independent capital city, where the neighborhood has evolved from a small village enclave at the urban periphery of colonial Accra to a densely populated and centrally located neighborhood. They tell their stories of the neighborhood and city as these places have grown, expanded, evolved, and become incredibly populated over several generations. I recognize these elders' knowing, from which they share their histories and stories. I also recognize their situated knowledge and experiences: I consider that each elder speaks from her/his own classed, gendered, sociopolitical position and location within Nima neighborhood and Accra.

The first conversation with Uncle Nat, former mayor of Accra, casts Accra as a site with long, rich histories of migration and diasporic formation and an attentiveness to colonial influences on spatial relations. I recognize the issues with placing first this interview with a politically influential and middle-class man, who is also not from Nima, in a chapter aiming to forefront local stories and histories, yet I do so for two reasons. First, this is the single interview in which all of us (Mustapha, Fatimatu, Larry, and me) participated. Second, we used this conversation to situate Nima within the context of Accra, and this interview plays a critical role in establishing Nima's founding and growth within both a local and global context; it therefore effectively grounds the subsequent four other conversations on Nima. The second conversation with Mr. Ibrahim Baro, who moved with his family to Nima in the 1930s, traces Nima's evolution, focusing on the commercialization of land and absent planning practices, which inform diminishing community spaces. Then, Hajja Mariam Salifu, president of a community mother's club in her community, situates children's play spaces and gendered spatial dynamics within the context of ever-diminishing open spaces. Then, Madame Abiba Suleiman, a health program leader, attends to the practical health and safety challenges produced through residents'

everyday claims taking up open space, as well as the politics of enforcement. In the final (fifth) conversation, Honorable Shareau Tajudeen, a long-time local political authority for Nima, emphasizes residents' lack of adherence to urban development plans in an increasingly built-up context and elaborates specific spatial logics through which residents claim and occupy open spaces. Reading these conversations together provides a relational and contextualized understanding of Nima and the social and political formations which shape this neighborhood. They illustrate Nima's local and global connections to continental and diasporic places and peoples, the hold of colonial terminologies and frames, the complex perceptions and aspirations concerning planning, and the predominance of residents' everyday spatial operations outside and beyond government view and enforcement.

Mr. Nat Nuno Amarteifio: Accra as a space of multiple migrations⁵

We meet Nat Nuno Amarteifio, who is former mayor of Accra (1994-98), architect, lecturer, and urban historian of both Accra and the Ga people (the indigenes of Accra), at his office. Of all the people we interview for our research, Uncle Nat (as I call him)⁶ is someone whom I knew beforehand. Shortly after I moved to Accra in 2010 after completing my master's degree, I worked under him on a small cultural heritage research project in Ga Mashie (also called Jamestown), where his family is from. I would spend long afternoons at his office, poring over historical photographs, listening to his long narratives of Accra's histories, and transcribing and co-writing histories of various sites and buildings. Each of his stories of the city is fed by years of listening to oral histories, his own academic research, reading, and learning the city, much of which he can recall when stirred by a single historical photo. As we pull up our chairs to the table and sit down together, I think about our location at his office, located near "Old Accra," which includes the historic neighborhoods of Ga Mashie and Osu, both initial coastal settlements of the Ga people. It is in Ga Mashie that Usshertown (the Portuguese settlement surrounding Fort Usher) and Jamestown (the British settlement expanding from James Fort) are located. This moment is significant in multiple respects: Learning again from my former boss, this time in a circle of learning that includes research collaborators, and tracing connections between Old Accra and Nima neighborhood.

⁵ Nat Nuno Amarteifio, interviewed by Victoria, Mustapha, Larry, and Fatimatu, August 19, 2019 (Accra, Ghana)

⁶ The "Uncle" in Uncle Nat is not because we are biologically related, but rather a title of familiarity and respect used in African and African diasporan cultures to address an elder one knows well. As such, this is how I refer to him in this thesis.

Uncle Nat begins by situating Accra in its own migration history, a starting point set several centuries before the founding of Nima in the early 1930s. “Accra has largely survived and prospered because of migration,” he says in a measured tone. “The Gas, who claim Accra to be their allodial territory, arrived here in the 13th, 14th century from Benin City in Nigeria...they traveled across the subregion and reached this area, the Accra Plains.” This is the first time that I consider the Ga people, the indigenes of Accra, as themselves migrants. We listen as he describes the Ga peoples’ initial small-scale trading activities in dried fish and salt, and I think of the teeming Nima Market as one iteration of regional commercial trade that has for long been central to African settlements. Uncle Nat reaches as far back as Marco Polo’s 13th century explorations through Asia to the Portuguese, Dutch, and finally the British arrival to Accra’s coast (in the 15th, 16th, and 19th centuries, respectively). He describes these global explorations in detail, the ways these encounters extend and establish trade routes, connections, and markets. In doing so, he positions Accra’s history within local and global networks which shift the major Ga coastal settlement into a colonial capital (Parker 2000). “I’m saying all of this simply to situate Accra as a trading outpost,” he says, “because without this intense trading activity, there would have been no need for zongos.” He uses the word “zongo,” a term that is often used to describe Nima and other migrant-founded neighborhoods, and we take this up later in this conversation.

“The most important thing is that they [European traders] discovered gold here, and plenty,” he says. “And the local people were willing to trade. So, they named this place the Gold Coast. Unfortunately, it also brought in slavery, because they also traveled on to South America and the Caribbean. So, the world changed dramatically in that hundred years of European exploration. You had slavery as a vector, a carrier of ideas and of people. It was vicious, but it happened....and essentially, trade is what pushed the creation of new societies,” he says.

I recall my visits to the slave trade forts, castles, and houses along Ghana’s coast with their disquieting histories. Cape Coast Castle, a two-hour drive from Accra, is one of the largest slave-trading forts in West Africa, and one of 50 such forts located in present-day Ghana (Hartman 2007). In Cape Coast Castle, layers of human blood, vomit, and feces from the millions of captives held there still visibly line the dank, dark dungeon walls; in the James Fort in Accra, the underground passages used to clandestinely transport captives remain; and some 100 meters down the road (the Jamestown High Street) is the run-down red brick William Franklin House, with its slave auction platform and underground tunnels located in

its interior. These slave trading sites remain part of Ghana's history and landscape. While the vast majority of captured Africans bound for the Americas and Caribbean passed through Elmina Castle, in the coastal city of Elmina, and the Cape Coast Castle, captured Africans were also brought through Accra, where they were held at Jamestown Fort and Christiansborg Castle (Engmann, 2019). As Uncle Nat says, "it was vicious": The trans-Atlantic trade, not including the regional and trans-Saharan slave trades, took an estimated 12 million African women, men, and children. It was a vast global enterprise lasting four centuries and producing a large, dispersed African diaspora. Scholars estimate that for every one slave who arrived to the Americas and Caribbean, between one and five persons died in the process between capture, the long trek on foot on these routes to the coast, imprisonment in barracoons, slave pens, and underground dungeons, and the months-long journey in the cramped belly of a slave ship (Hartman, 2007, p. 31). Moving through these spaces in Ghana, and the memory of these spaces, these facts of ancestors' lives expended for the creation of "modern" societies are heavy and materially ever-present. Yet for many Ghanaians, these histories and their local impacts are complicated and uncomfortable realities to acknowledge (Holsey, 2008).

Uncle Nat continues, shifting to the Europeans' engagement with regional slave trading to build colonial structures in Accra. "Europeans did not survive too long here, because it was unhealthy - there were all kinds of diseases, for which they had no immunity, and they died like flies," Uncle Nat says, snapping his fingers. "But they came here to trade, and they stuck at it. But to do the heavy work, to build their castles and forts, they had to rely on local artisans," he says. From the 15th century, Ga leaders gave permission to European trading companies to construct forts and castles, all situated in very close proximity to this settlement at the coast, he explains.

"A lot of [these workers] came from Allada, a slave port [in present-day Benin]," Uncle Nat says. "So Osu has an Alata community. Jamestown has an Alata community." The Allada slave port was a key economic node in the vast, organized economy of the Dahomey Kingdom that lasted three centuries (1600-1904) and at its greatest extent included much of southern Benin and reached from southwestern Togo to southwestern Nigeria. The kingdom grew to power through conquest and its massive slave-based economy. To construct the James Fort in Accra, the British Royal African Company obtained enslaved laborers from Allada, and construction of the James Fort and Christiansborg Castle took several years. After completing the work, these individuals (Alata) stayed on, and became part of

the Ga people in these respective indigenous settlements (Quayson, 2014; Parker, 2000).

“They [Jamestown and Osu Alata] came here 400 years ago. Now, at the time, the Ga institutions were quite strong, so these Alata people were assimilated into Ga society. They started speaking the language, marrying into the Ga society. They maintained some residues of their original inheritance, but by and large, they had become part of the Ga fabric,” Uncle Nat says. “I cite this simply to show how far back the integration of the communities have been,” Uncle Nat continues. I remember reading about the Ga people’s asrafo tradition, borrowed from the Fante people, where any able-bodied person, including enslaved or low social status, could fight in defense of the Ga polity and through their military contribution, earn their freedom (if necessary) and a place as member in Ga society. Through this indigenous process of acculturation, different peoples, once strangers, were absorbed into Ga society, from Akamu migrants to Fante fisherman, to Alata and other enslaved laborers (Akyeampong, 2002). Today, the Alata are recognized members of Ga society, with fully Ga identity and spatial presence in Old Accra, along with a recognized stool house (the Ngleshie Alata Mantse Palace) that is situated across the street from the James Fort, recognizing the influences, part of their heritage, through which they have become Ga - their passage through the Allada slave-trading market, and their location in the once British-controlled Jamestown area.

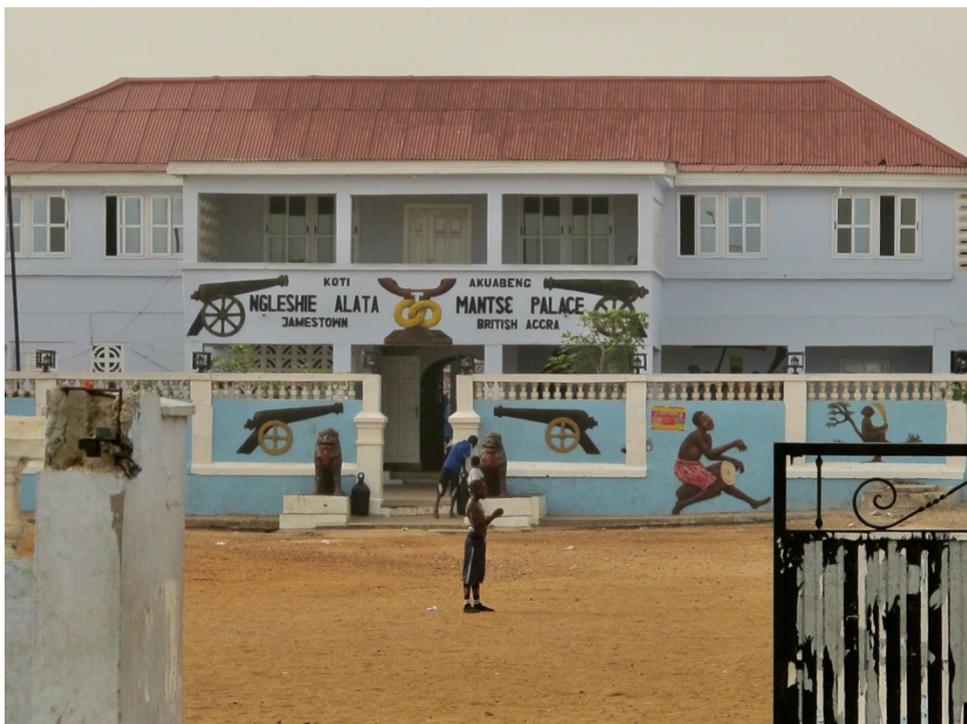


Image 3. Ngleshie Alata Mantse Palace in Ga Mashie Jamestown, Accra (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

“Prior to the end of the 19th century, Accra was essentially Jamestown, Bukom, Usshertown, and Osu. That was generally Accra,” Uncle Nat said. The 1927 Accra map below indicates the neighborhoods that Uncle Nat mentions. To date, many people in the city still refer to this and the adjacent major commercial area with the city’s largest markets as “Accra.” The map below also visualizes the extent of British colonial town planning in place, laid out through area schemes following street grids (indicated in gray), and indicating key colonial government buildings and infrastructures.

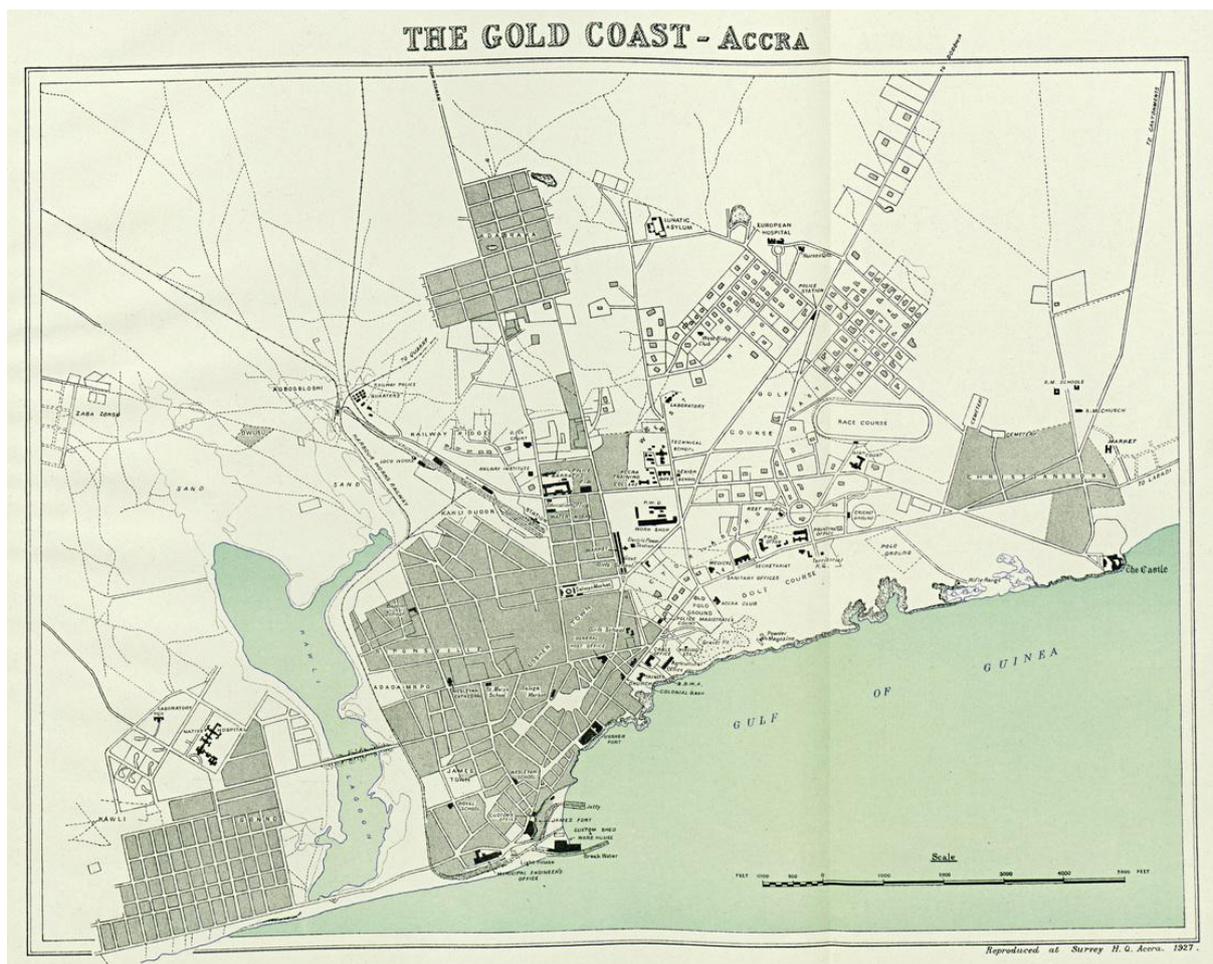


Image 4. Map of the colonial capital of Accra (1927) (Source: Basel Mission)

Yet this above Gold Coast colonial map, which outlines and details the European colonial spaces and infrastructures in the expanding colonial territory of Accra, also (dis)misses indigenous spaces. For example, made absent from this map is the indigenous settlement of Ga Mashie, referred to by colonial administrators as the “native town” (Pierre, 2013; Grant & Yankson, 2003). Research on traditional planning and design approaches in African settlements (Amankwah-Ayeh, 1996)

and on traditional Ga conceptions, ownership, and usage of land (Sackeyfio, 2012) demonstrate the centuries-long knowledge and application of indigenous African design, relations, and usage of space. Amankwah-Ayeh focuses on specific design practices, for example circularity in settlement designs, the centrality and usage of open spaces and plazas, and the production of boundaries through walls as part of settlement-making traditions. Sackeyfio's (2012) emphasis on spatial practices and usage demonstrates how individual community members and groups could access and use stool (indigenous authority) or family lands with permission or if lands were left unattended, unused, and therefore open to other uses. This included strangers, that is, those who came from other peoples or settlements, who could take up unused lands to make their own shelters and commerce. These and other scholars also underline the role of indigenous religious and political authorities, the heads of families, and communities in allocating land and different forms of regulation and control over various land uses, including residential, farming, crafts, trading, and preservation of communal spaces (Bikam & Chakwizira, 2020; Garba, 2010).

Uncle Nat mentions these shifting approaches to space as the colonial government instituted and implemented British colonial town planning and design interventions that sought to reproduce European design, aesthetics, and sense of place in Accra's environment. This was part of the implementation of western spatial frameworks on space (Pierre, 2013; Njoh, 2007; Grant & Yankson, 2003), which overtook indigenous authorities' traditional influence and practices in planning, controlling, and administering land for inhabitation (Mamdani, 1996). Uncle Nat explains how this took place through the forced introduction of new ideas of land ownership and commodification of land. "Turning this place into a British political responsibility meant that you needed infrastructure," Uncle Nat says. "It meant you needed roads, you needed government facilities, and what have you. Now, before then, land was not a commodity. If you're from Bukom [part of Ga Mashie] like me, and you want land to build a house, you went to the family head. He will tell you 'Ok, our family lands are from here to there, we can give you something over there.' So, you go and you do the appropriate thing: You pour libation and pay something to the gods, and you're allocated the land. You build your home on it, and you live there with your family. If you needed more land and the land wasn't big enough, you simply moved. Land was not an exchangeable commodity. When the British came and colonized and began to build infrastructure, they needed to hold that land in perpetuity. Do you understand?"

Still processing, we remain quiet, and it is Mustapha who speaks up first. "No," he says.

“In other words,” Uncle Nat begins again, “before the British started building infrastructure, nobody *owned* land,” he says, stressing the word. “You used it for whatever you needed - to farm, to house your family. But ownership was very fluid, it belonged to the whole group. Once the British started acquiring land, of course in conjunction with other measures - for example, for them to settle here as political overlords, they had to change the power of the local chiefs. The local chiefs could before then lead their armies into war, commit people to death for crimes as they describe it, make judgements, have their own prisons. The British decided that no, ‘If we are going to be the overlords, we cannot allow them also to have these rights.’ Unfortunately for many of the local chiefs, that was the way they made their living. The chief didn’t own land, but when the farmer went and hunted and shot something, a portion of it was sent to the chief’s palace. When the farmers’ harvested their food, a portion of that was sent to the chief’s palace. Suddenly, all of that was cut. The only thing that the chiefs still had some rights to was the land, the dispersal of the land.”

Uncle Nat here refers to the introduction of colonial ordinances, land laws, and creation of native tribunals in the colonial process of indirect rule. These structures aimed to profoundly shift indigenous authority generally but also specifically over land. In terms of territory, this transformed land by commodifying it and shaping it into government, personal, and stool lands, which could then be purchased, sold, and owned. Colonial rule maintained local chiefs as arbiters over some land practices; in terms of indigenous authorities’ powers, colonial rule curtailed their extent and circumscribed them within and under colonial government purview (Sackeyio, 2012; Mamdani, 1996).

I ask Uncle Nat about how residents’ spatial practices of claiming and occupying land have challenged these colonial and post-independent planning controls on space. “Well, land is the only commodity that Accra has, and local government is frankly too weak to protect these public trusts. That’s why we lost so many of these spaces,” Uncle Nat says, referring to not just Nima, but this phenomenon across Accra. “I was looking for a newspaper article that appeared in one of the local papers in 1920 something or the other, where a hawker [British term for street vendor or mobile trader] was taken to court for hawking on the streets and sentenced. Accra today isn’t what it used to be. Even when I was kid, you didn’t see people hawking on the streets as much as you see it today. There were rules and laws to prevent hawking in the streets and they were enforced. Today any open space is constantly invaded and violated.”

Hawking is also a colonial English term applied to indigenous practices of mobile commercial street vending (George, 2011). Uncle Nat's description evidences the continual emergence of these spatial practices outside of and despite the colonial and post-independent plans, policies, and regulations that sought to transform spatial relations with land. As Uncle Nat mentions, these administrative tools never fully stopped these practices, but do seem to have influenced how these activities are discursively framed in both academic, policy, and local discourses, as invasions and violations in open spaces. This is particularly evidenced, I found, in the use of the term "encroachment" to describe a wide array of spatial practices in community spaces, and this term emerges from conversations with two elders later in this chapter.

Uncle Nat shifts our conversation to Nima specifically. "The whole idea of identifiable zongos came at the end of the 19th century, when Accra started to expand away from the coast." Locals, government authorities, and academics employ the term "zongo" to refer to neighborhoods like Nima. These are areas founded by Muslim migrants and home to large, but not wholly, populations of Muslims who come from Northern Ghana and more widely the West African region. Scholars employ multiple meanings of the Hausa term: "temporary settlement" and "strangers' quarters" (Pellow, 2001, p. 59); "traveler's camp" and "stop-over" (Williamson, 2017, p. 22); and from the Hausa term "zango," meaning "community, settlement, station or society" (Yussif, 2016, p. 29). Uncle Nat mentioning this term brought to my mind these different definitions, and our participation at the Ghana Studies Association conference, where a paper session titled "Theorizing Zongos: Strangers and Their Communities in Ghana"⁷ took place and included Ghanaian, US, and European scholars. After this conference, and having read this scholarship, I am curious about the perpetuation of zongo as a temporary place, or a place for strangers, particularly when neighborhoods and their residents have now existed in Accra for generations. I bring this up, discussing this conference and my discomfort. "It seemed when people talk about Nima and other neighborhoods as zongos, people were framing them as strangers' communities - that they're still strangers," I begin and then pause. "But....as you've said, the Ga historically have been here for a long time. So...in a way, if you're not Ga, and you're in Accra, to some level you're a stranger, right?"

⁷ This session takes place at the Ghana Studies Association Third Triennial Conference. University of Ghana, July 10-13, 2019.

“You sound apologetic,” Uncle Nat says. “Just state it: Of course you are.” I wonder aloud why only certain groups then, and among Ghanaians, for example, those from Northern Ghana, continue to be framed as strangers in the city of Accra, while others are not. This is based on conversations I’d had with Larry, where he had expressed his lived experiences where Northerners in Accra (regardless of their religious identity), and Muslims in Accra (regardless of their ethnic identity), and Nima residents (regardless of religious or ethnic identity) are framed as Other.

“It’s very nuanced,” and that’s why we need scholarship,” Uncle Nat responds and then moves on to mention the predominance of Yoruba market women traders from Ibadan (present-day southwest Nigeria) whose commercial activities helped found Makola Market, Accra’s biggest market, in the 1920s.

We begin to ask questions about when Accra authorities officially recognized Nima as part of the city. “Did Nima exist before [Kwame] Nkrumah or was it after Nkrumah that Nima exists actively?” Larry asks, referring to Ghana’s first president who came into office when Ghana gained independence in 1957.

“The Ring Road was supposed to be the boundary of Accra,” Uncle Nat answers, and he adds that it was because of Nima’s population growth and residents’ strong political affiliation with Nkrumah’s political party that Nima was officially incorporated into the city. “Nima became a new site [in the city] and of course, it started to attract the migrants. Because of its founding, a lot of them were mostly Muslim. So that gave Nima a certain homogeneity. People think that Nima is mostly Muslim, it’s not. Probably equally Christian and Muslim. But it’s the only place where you have a very strong Muslim personality.”

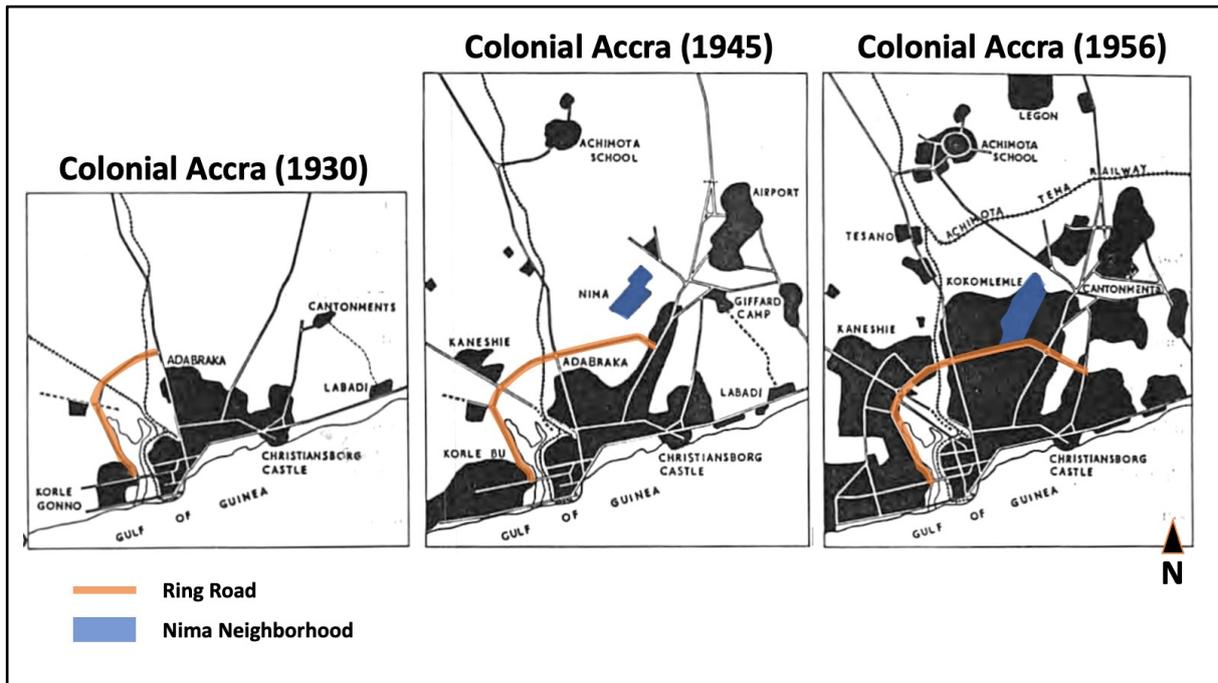


Figure 1. Colonial Accra's expansion, with Nima indicated (Base map source: Ministry of Housing 1958; illustration by Victoria Okoye)

This statement reminds me of a conversation that Larry, Mustapha, Fatimatu, and I had on city plans for Nima, and I ask Uncle Nat about the existence of such plans for the neighborhood. “Oh there have been plans, there have been plans, and some of it’s being effected now,” he says. “But Nima is not going to look like Airport Residential area.” Airport Residential is one of Accra’s high-class and exclusive neighborhoods, home to expatriates and affluent Ghanaians, international embassies and business offices.⁸ “The social formation is totally different. Nor is it necessary. I mean, if you live in Airport Residential, you wouldn’t know who your neighbor is. In Nima, you know who your neighbor is, who their children are. It’s a community.”

“So a question,” Mustapha begins. “So when the government says that they want to rebuild Nima. How do they mean to do it?” Larry turns to him. “Are you talking about the current government?” he asks.

Mustapha nods his head. “Yes, the current government.”

⁸ In Accra’s urban trajectory as a globalizing city, neighborhoods like Airport Residential form part of the “globalizing from above” process where foreign companies and corporate spaces are rapidly transforming the city’s urban economy (Grant, 2009).

“They want to make Nima like Dubai,” Larry responds.

“That’s a lot of rubbish. That’s rubbish,” Uncle Nat interjects.

“Why?” Mustapha asks.

“Why should they make it like Dubai?” Uncle Nat asks back to him.

“Not even Airport Residential?” asks Fatimatu.

Mentioning his role teaching a class for a US university study abroad program in Accra, Uncle Nat says: “I meet American students who have been to [the university campus in] Dubai. And they tell me that those tall high-rise buildings you see, they are empty. First of all, the population is too small. And why the hell do you want to live half a mile up in the sky? So, it’s for show. And the vibrancy of places like Nima is that it still contains a functioning society.”

We think on that for a few moments, and it is Fatimatu who asks the last question of our interview. “So, does Nima still seem to be a zongo community?”

“Well, see, it’s a question of terminology,” Uncle Nat says. “When we say zongo, we generally mean a place of strangers. That’s the Hausa [language]. But it’s also a brand,” he says. “Nima is also very strong, and there are zongos all around Africa, I know in Nigeria they have them, too.”

Larry chimes in. “In Benin they have zongo. In Togo they have zongo, too.” Our conversation ends there, with us noting that “zongo” was how Nima has been heavily branded in Accra, while also noticing the many similar neighborhoods like Nima that exist in other West African countries.

This conversation with Uncle Nat explores the emergence and evolution of Accra as a trading post and locates local, regional, and global migrations as central to the city’s growth and change. Framing Accra as a city that has grown and evolved due to migrations demonstrates a relational approach toward understanding Accra and its neighborhood. In this way, this narrated conversation is particularly significant in its contribution to an alternative conception of Accra, one that challenges the widely cited and more recent scholarly and popular framings of Nima as a “migrant” community (Cassiman, 2018; Oteng-Ababio, Melara Arguello, & Gabbay, 2013;

Owusu, Agyei-Mensah, & Lund, 2008; Pellow, 1991) by demonstrating that in fact, migration, in the forms of forced and voluntary diasporic arrival, departure, and return has always been constitutive of Accra's urban and social formation. Our conversation did not even encompass the entire gamut of migrations, for example, the Tabon people (liberated Africans who left Brazil in the 1830s, returned back to the continent, and settled in Accra, blending into Ga society, or those enslaved as part of the domestic and the trans-Saharan slave trades, or consideration of the more recent waves of African Diaspora returnees to Ghana (Greene, 2011; Amos & Ayesu, 2002). These multiple waves of migration, taken together, have fundamentally shaped Accra as an urban, commercial, and social center, in a process that produces both local and global diasporas. This conversation therefore places Accra and Nima in relation with the global Black geographic world, specifically other African locations and the African Diaspora.

In this conversation, Uncle Nat also sets up how colonialism introduced territorial controls as well as the commodification of land, connected to propertied land ownership, as part of inserting Accra into the global capitalist economy. This shift from land use to land ownership, through colonial planning policies, regulations, and agencies subverted traditional authorities' powers in the allocation and management of land and has shifted how everyday spatial relations are framed. Relatedly, from these conversations emerge divergent aspirations concerning Nima's future. Mustapha and Fatimatu, who from their lived experiences in Nima mention aspirations toward an aesthetic and plan like Dubai, or more locally, the Airport Residential neighborhood, Uncle Nat points to Nima's social formation and neighborliness that make it distinct from those places. These divergent aspirations set up the tensions at play between Nima's grounded reality, spatial relations, and "distinct social formation," and futures oriented toward a modern, globalized Accra.

Mr. Abdallahi Ibrahim Baro: The founding and growth of Nima⁹

The sky is overcast the morning that Larry and I make our way to the family house of Mr. Abdullahi Ibrahim Baro. We meet him in front of his home, a single story cement-walled residence with cream-colored walls. Mr. Baro sits in one of the red plastic chairs stationed right in front of his home, in an open courtyard area where he is surrounded by children playing. As we introduce ourselves, women, perhaps their mothers, shoo the children away. The children move away dutifully, relocating to the other side of the house. Mr. Baro, Larry, and I sit down in the plastic chairs,

⁹ Abdullahi Ibrahim Baro, interviewed by Victoria and Larry, January 30, 2019 (Accra, Ghana)

facing one another. Larry informed me beforehand that Mr. Baro had moved to Nima with his family in the mid-1930s, when he was a young child, and this house where we now sit was one of the first houses built in Nima.

We introduce ourselves, and I start by asking Mr. Baro about himself and his arrival to Nima. “Ok,” he begins, “we came to Nima, we were staying with my parents, I and my brothers and sisters. I would say it was about 1932 when they said Nima boundary was for settlement by a man called by the name Mallam Futa. He is the founder of the area. More or less he was a stranger, but he is a chief in this Accra area. So he contacted the Gas [Ga people] about where he wanted to make a settlement, something called a zongo zongo. So they gave him this area.” Mr. Baro is beginning with al-Hajji Amadu Futa, whom he and many Nima residents refer to simply as Mallam Futa, a wealthy Fula cattle herder, religious leader, and migrant. Some scholars refer to Mallam Futa as a “northern migrant” (Quayson, 2014, p. 90) and others point his heritage to Senegambia (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2008). Mallam Futa had made a land agreement with the Odoi Kwao family, the Ga family with authority over this land, at that time a forested area beyond the municipal boundaries of colonial Accra, still beyond the claims and settlement of British colonial occupation, which began in 1821 and ended 1957¹⁰.

“So in 1932, I think he informed all the people who are coming from Aboko who are settled in Accra. When he told them, some of our fathers too got to know, and they had an interest. So he [Mallam Futa] had a surveyor, and then he plotted the area. And anyone that contacted him that they want a place, he gives it to them, and then he took from them - at that time, we will say that it’s 10 shillings. So people started building. In 1937, that’s when my father came here. My elder brother who knows the layout, he informed us that the area is here. When we came, there were eight houses in Nima, and people were living in seven. The eighth one [is the one] that we came and we built. My father had built these three rooms, up to the window levels - this one, this one, and this other one,” he says, pointing behind us to these rooms. “This is how we came to Nima.” From those three semi-built rooms, today the house is an extended dwelling, housing multiple families.

¹⁰ British colonial occupation began through a gradual accumulation of land, territory, economy. It began with the seizure of lands at the coast in 1821 to the gradual capture of all other territories through military defeats and subjugation (Appiah, 2012).

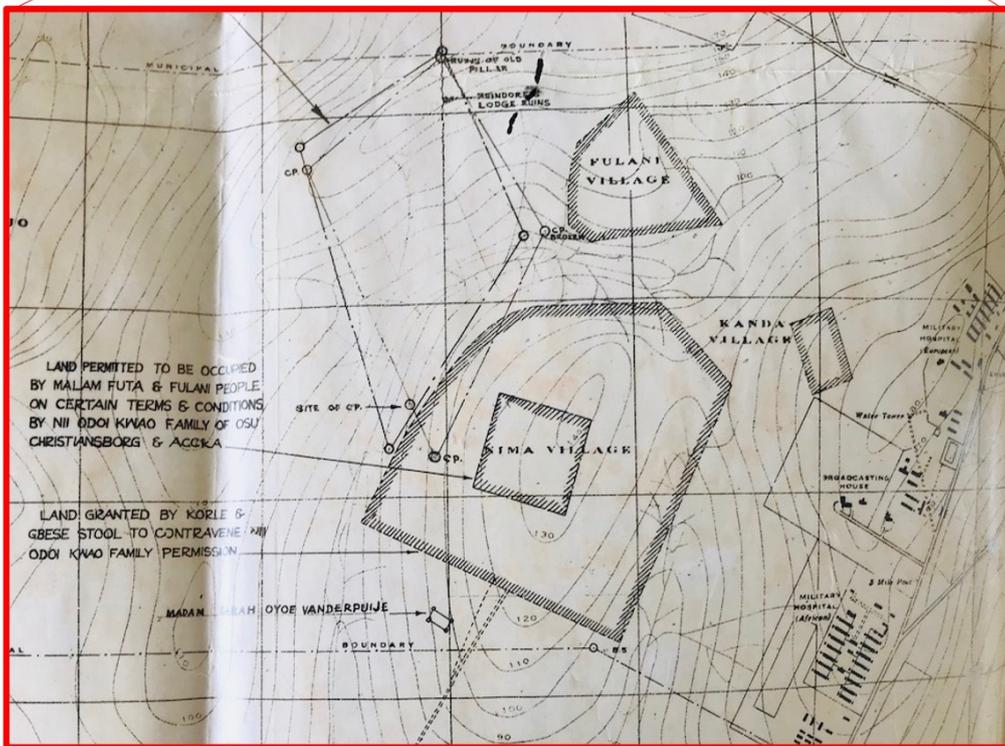
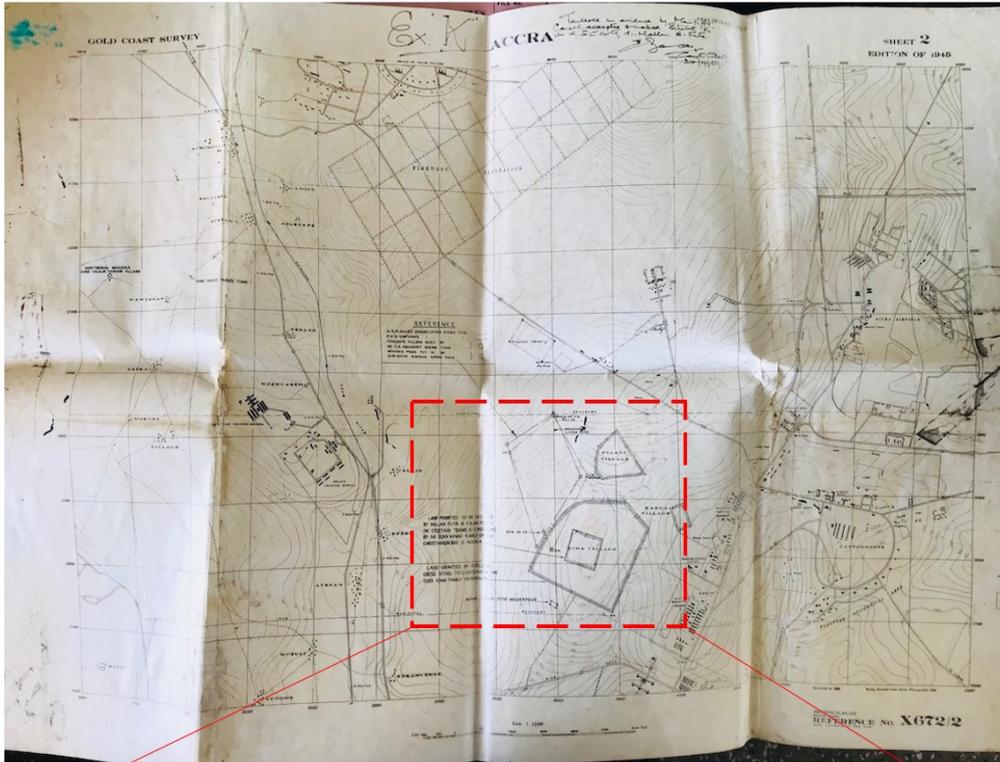


Figure 2. Map of Nima Village (Source: Gold Coast Survey Map of Accra, Sheet 2. 1945. Reference No. X672/2. Public Records and Archives Administration Department. Accra, Ghana). Illustration by Victoria Okoye

“I would say that Sabon Zongo is the second zongo, because the first zongo, we will say is the one at Cow Lane area,” Mr. Baro says, referring to Cow Lane, where Mallam Futa had first resided when he came to Accra.

“Cow Lane. Around Ga Mashie [Old Accra]?” I ask. In my mind, I recall the bright green street sign with white lettering, at this street now just north of Ga Mashie neighborhood.

“Yeah, that’s the first zongo,” Larry says, answering my question directly. “Then the second zongo is the Sabon Zongo, at Kaneshie [in central Accra]. Sabon Zongo means ‘new settlement,’ ‘new zongo.’ So the old one is the one at Cow Lane at Ga Mashie.”

“And what does zongo mean?” I ask.

Mr. Baro begins. “Zongo, it’s an area where people... where the travellers, if they travel, the area that if it is night, where they settle. You see, sometimes they stay two days, they stay seven days and then they cross somewhere else, this is how they call the place, a zongo. Any time travelers, they reach there and stay there for some few days, and then cross away. This is how they call zongo,” he says, and then pauses. “So Nima, it’s about 1936 or 1937 when Mallam Futa got a few people who came with ram. They sat down, the ones who want to give the name. People [initially] called here Mallam Futa Village, Zongo Mallam Futa. When he came, he said he wants to name the area --”

“ -- Officially, officially,” Larry interjects.

“Officially,” Mr. Baro says. “The name Nima is the one they made it officially, the way you would give a name to a child. This is how they do it, with a ram.”

Larry turns to me. “Do you understand what he’s saying?” I shake my head to indicate no.

Larry explains. “He’s saying that before, it wasn’t Nima. It was called Mallam Futa’s Zongo. But when he got people to agree to settle here, they wanted to give it an official name: Nima. Muslim people, if you give birth to a baby, then after one week, you have to kill a very big sheep like a sacrifice to thank God, so that’s where they got a very big ram, to give to the Ga people who gave land for Nima, and they pray.”

“Nima in Arabic language is -”

“Blessing,” Larry says.

“Nima,” Mr. Baro says. He enunciates the word to draw out its Arabic origin.

“People who got wealthy,” he says, adding to the meaning.

“Like a very successful place. And that’s why they gave it the name Nima,” Larry says.

Months later, during my visit to the National Archives, I would find the list of enstooled towns and villages in Accra, which documented that Futa Village (which would later be renamed Nima) was enstooled in 1936 with Mallam Futa as the head authority or elder of the area (“onukpa” in the Ga language).

Exhibit '4' - contd:

State Ga	Division Gbese	No.	Town or Village.	Title.	Name	Year Enstooled.
	<u>contd:</u>	66.	Ayi Churu	Onukpa.	Iyitey	1939.
5.		67.	Larteman	"	Lartoi	1932.
		68.	Akuso	"	Elotey	1923.
		69.	Ayitoman	"	Iyitey	1932.
		70.	Ayorbi	"	Itukwei	1932.
10.		71.	Addoman	"	Iddo	1932.
		72.	Kwartaman	"	Iyiffo	1933.
		73.	Lagos	"	Irmah	1933.
		74.	Lartey Gtsamiman	"	Laryea Kwashie	1938.
		75.	Keloi	"	Iyitey Kofi	1938.
		76.	Agbogba	"	Iao Boyi	1933.
15.		77.	Paudea	"	Iyi Bonto	1935.
		78.	Akotoashi	"	Imoo	1922.
		79.	Fanti Fanti	"	J.H. Randolph.	-
		80.	Fooyor	"	G. Amoaku.	1920.
		81.	Akokomo	"	Ewo	1937.
20.		82.	Ochiribra	"	Ofoi	1928.
		83.	Agbogbleshie	"	Solo Nettoy	1934.
		84.	Kwanum	"	Larye	1930.
		85.	Shikpontelo	"	Kwaku	1933.
		86.	Itrohsan	"	B.A. Ntroh	1935.
25.		87.	Siyonna	"	Brimah	1927.
		88.	Kasuma	"	Tetty	1919.
		89.	Hantso	"	Oman	1935.
		90.	Onatia	"	Iyitey	1932.
		91.	Magbo Mada	"	Maakwei	1927.
30.		92.	Futa	"	Malam Futa.	1936.

Figure 3. Extract from the Gold Coast Chiefs List 194. Reference No. CVA85/60. Public Records and Archives Administration Department. Accra, Ghana.

“So you see what the name he gave the area, we are still having it. And that is how you see the town now. You see how the [market] stalls are everywhere, everything,” Mr. Baro says, alluding to the extent of commercial activity in Nima.

Larry laughs affirmatively. “The zongo is making money,” he says.

“Everybody selling everything,” Mr. Baro agrees. “So this is how we say Nima had the naming of the area in 1940, 1941.” Just then, it begins to rain, first light sprinkles, then quickly increasing. We move into the house, and within minutes, rain becomes a downpour, the raindrops drumming on the roof.

Mr. Baro continues. “It reached a time where the town started growing. During 1939 to 45, the Second World War broke out. People started coming to Nima, because the government started building this Burma Camp [a military barracks used by British to store war materials for Allied forces]. Some of the people came from outside Accra, and people used to come from Adabraka, from Sabon Zongo, they used to walk by foot to the Burma Camp to come to work,” he explains. “So those people also got the land here. Those people who are working there [at Burma Camp], those people started renting here. That time, it is two shillings a month to stay in the room.”

“To rent?” I ask.

He nods his head affirmatively. “The whole month, you pay two shillings. So people who got the land, they started rushing, building, doing everything just to get rent. This is how we got this place in Nima,” he says, gesturing toward his home. He is referring to his family, but also indicating this trend of the neighborhood’s expansion. As Accra expanded, so too did Nima, becoming more urban and more densely built up. The expansion of Accra from the coast northward toward Nima, alongside these new economic activities created a housing demand, which in turn drove construction and occupancy. This increased with the war, given Nima’s low rental costs and proximity to employment opportunities at the Burma Camp military barracks (Songsore, 2003).

“You’ve said the history of Nima, how it was founded, but there are people from all different places coming and living here,” I mention.

“I will say that Nigerians, all the tribes are here, because I’ve been in Ghana a very long time, since the Yorubas and the Hausas,” Mr. Baro says. “The Igbos, those from Warri, as for them, most of them were steward boys to flight and army officers. Some of them, they brought their wives, they made small small stores selling bread, tea leaves, and everything. The Yorubas, most of them, women sell in the market, they brought these small small medicines, they too they sell in the market. So this is how people were going. There too were some Yoruba women, they used to bring this weaving cloth from Nigeria. Some of them bought cloths to sell in Nigeria. They

used to buy from here, and sell there. So we have the Nigerians here, we've got these Northerners, all the countries, these Akans, we have everything. Even in the Ga areas in Accra here, they speak Twi [the language of the Akan] more than Ga, because these Akans have dominated the area, because of the capital."

"And then within Nima itself?" I ask.

He laughs. "Ah ha, Nima town. When the building start, you don't get the Akans much; as for them, they're not interested to get the land. Even the Northerners, even the Gas from that time, this area...it's a bush. So people don't like to go too far away. If not because of the work at this 37 [Military Hospital] and Burma Camp, people would not have come here. So during that time, the area become popular. So now that the place become popular, because all these things... you see all the stores in the area, the buildings, two story, three story. It's people who come to lease from the owners and then build - sometimes 10-years, 20-years, 40-years [leases]. This is how the stores and everything came up. This is why we see the name given to the area - Nima - this is what now we've been seeing. On the map of the area, and God too now has given us."

"So if you see an Akan having buildings here, apart from the stores, they've bought from somebody. Also some of the Gas here. But I don't think the Gas who are building here can be more than 10," Mr. Baro says, and he proceeds to identify the Ga-owned properties, their specific houses, and buildings, naming these families he has known for decades. "So as for the Northerners, these people from Togo, the Kotokolis, that time, some of them were in the bush, they were working with cocoa. During that time, because they started rushing [to Nima] because of the work that the government were giving, some of them too began to come.

As Mr. Baro lists these early groups, he references their entanglements with the emergence of colonial industries and trade (like cocoa). Mr. Baro draws on his memories and remembered connections, and at one point he shifts from English to Hausa. Now it is only Larry following along, nodding, and replying in Hausa, asking questions, and he begins laughing. "Yeah, it's true," he says. "Wow," he laughs.

"What was he saying?" I ask Larry when they finish. "He was telling me about my grandfather," he says, smiling.

"We were here before his grandfather came," Mr. Baro says, then goes on to mention the place where Larry's grandfather and family had stayed upon moving to

Nima and the grandfather's job teaching at a Koranic school close to the Nima Market. Our conversation meanders to the religious makeup of the Nima neighborhood. "Though it's a Muslim who founded here...from far back, I will say 1940, 41, when people started coming here, nobody interfered with somebody's religion. This is how it is Nima," Mr. Baro says.

I wanted to hear more about the changing open spaces in Nima. "I want to ask about space, the open spaces," I said.

"See, that is the mistake that Mallam Futa did. He didn't make a plan [as was done] in Madina," Mr. Baro says. In 1959, Alhaji Seido Karbo founded the Madina neighborhood at the northern edge of contemporary Accra, with permission from the La Mantse (chief of the La territory), and he worked with city officials prior to settlement (Adum-Atta, 2020).

"He got the land there for resettlement.... and he brought the town planning and social welfare [city authorities] for the resettlement," Mr. Baro continued. "The town planners, when they came in, they made the plan," he explains, adding that they even visited Adabraka, a colonial residential scheme and neighborhood targeted to African middle-class residents. "They said the layout at Adabraka is the one they want. So during the time when they made a plan, they used to give open spaces...This is how they did that area. So you see that all the zongos, I will say in Ghana, we don't get a place like Madina. It's well laid out. We will say in Madina, he made the plan, they got a market, they got industrial and got open spaces...Because he, the founder of Madina, was a head laborer at PWD [Public Works Department] branch building road construction and everything. So he had the knowledge and the draftsmen at that place, and some of them were engineers, I think they were advising him, I don't know. But I will take it he had a vision from that place, that's why we see Madina is different from Nima." Larry laughs.

Mr. Baro's statement demonstrates that Mallam Futa didn't maintain the layout and planning that he first initiated as authority in Nima, nor did he work with city authorities in coordinating a plan Nima as it expanded. This is despite the historical approaches to the design and management of African settlements, where, for example, central market activities would be located adjacent to authorities' residence within the settlement (Garba, 2010; Amankwah-Ayeh, 1996). I ask if there was any sort of planning like this, even at the community-level, for Nima.

"As for that one, no, no," Mr. Baro says.

“So people were just buying and selling?” I ask.

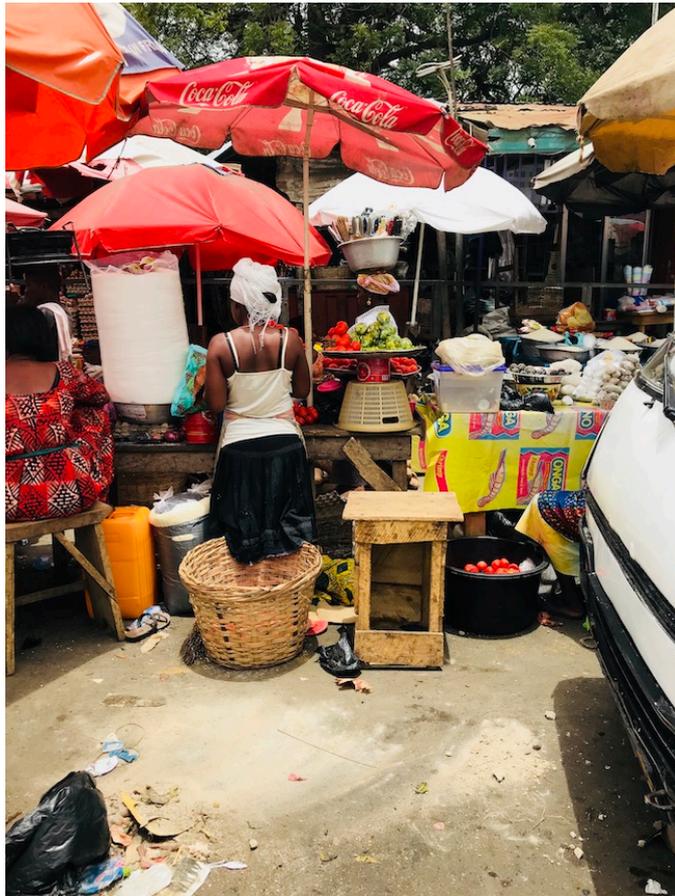
“During that time, if you see somebody’s land, they will build something, and if there’s remaining land, people want to sell it. They are the landlord, that was how it was done. You see this [Nima] market, Mallam Futa didn’t plan for market when he was given the land. During the time when people started building here, women used to come from this Kokomlemle, some from Accra carrying smoked fish, some of them bring kenkey and fried fish, they used to come around selling during the times people were working. So, in the midday, when the sun was very high, then they go to some neem trees there, they go and sit at that place,” he says.

“Which place?” I ask. “Nima Market,” Larry says.

“The present Nima Market - the road?” I ask.

“Yes, there are neem trees over there,” Larry says. “They sit under the neem trees to relax.”

“Ahhhh, ok,” I say, as I realize that this former open space Mr. Baro is describing is the present Nima Market, just a five-minute walk from where we sit.



**Image 5. Vendors at Nima Wednesday Market, with neem trees in background March 2018
(Photo by Victoria Okoye)**



Image 6. Street view of Nima Wednesday Market, March 2018 (Photo by Victoria Okoye)



Image 7. Median vending at Nima Wednesday Market, March 2018 (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

Mr. Baro continues: “Because of the shade, they used to stay there in the afternoon, up to sometimes until 4 or 5 [pm], before they go back to Accra where they stay.”¹¹ So this is how they started doing. Because that area is people’s land. So because of how the town spread rapidly, all that area, people are selling, so those people who get the land, some of them, they haven’t got money. They don’t come forward to [establish a commercial market]. So those who had the money, some of them put up two room, three-room houses. On the other side, that one is open [space] during that time. And then they started marketing there. The marketing starts with firewood, people used to bring firewood from the farm,” he says.

“Some of them used to bring food in bags, they used to come there, and people would buy. So when the market become very fast, it disturbed those there, who lived there,” he says, adding that the increasing commercial activity even pushed the construction of a new school, now called Nima Cluster of Schools, to relocate its students.

¹¹ It is typical for people in the city of Accra to refer to “Accra” as “Old Accra,” the historic neighborhoods and the commercial center of Makola Market, both in the past and now.

Mr. Baro's experiences and observations show a long historical trajectory that contextualizes Nima's evolution from a village founded at the city's periphery and populated with a few homes to a densely packed urban neighborhood. As Uncle Nat mentions in the first section of this chapter, when Nima was founded, its location was outside of the municipal boundaries of the colonial city and the city's planning controls. As Mr. Baro describes, the arrangement to secure the land for Nima was made between African leadership, between Mallam Futa and the Odoi Kwao family, a Ga family who held authority over the land (Quayson, 2014). This demonstrates, at least initially, the creation of a residential area situated outside of colonial frameworks and dominance, both in terms of physical location and with regards to spatial planning and relations. Mr. Baro brings additional layers to our understanding of the term "zongo," both the original name for Nima and also as a lens through which to view the neighborhood's early spatial practices as unsettled, shifting, provisional practices, and operating outside of dominant planning and its settled framework. These modes and practices have persisted within Nima's official incorporation into the city of Accra.

Mallam Futa named this place Nima, with aspirations for residents' wealth, success, and blessings. Soon enough, Nima became subsumed and influenced by the commercial land processes and Accra's expanding urban presence, which produced deep demand for land and housing given Nima's proximity to booming employment opportunities. Mr. Baro's descriptions of these commercial land processes reflect the colonial commodification of land that Uncle Nat describes, as well as the complexities produced from a lack of community or leadership in the management of land use. This gap leaves open these land processes to individual landlords and inhabitants to self-organize. In the absence of any form of "planning," whether indigenous, colonial, or post-independent, self-organized practices have flourished, with inhabitants claiming spaces for residential, commercial, and livelihood activities. Mr. Baro makes a direct connection between these practices and the taking over of once-open spaces. He also makes a salient comparison between Nima and Madina, also founded by a Muslim leader. At Madina, located at the urban edge of contemporary Accra, the founder worked closely with post-independent planning officials and practices to lay out the neighborhood.

Mr. Baro's experiences and observations also speak to Uncle Nat's point about Nima's distinct "social formation." Both of these conversations speak to the ways that processes of land commodification and urbanization have influenced Accra and Nima's evolving and increasingly dense spatial landscape. Yet within and beyond

this material landscape is also a relational one that pervades Mr. Baro's telling of Nima's history. His close attention to building practices, trends in residential growth, and who and where different groups and individuals settle demonstrate his ways of relating to the individuals and situating himself in Nima neighborhood. His family's connection and opportunity to come to Nima is predicated on his elder brother's knowledge of Mallam Futa's plans in laying out the area, a relation made material through his family's house, which today he and his own family reside in. In recalling Larry's grandfather, he notes not only the individual in abstract, but also where he lives and memories about him, which he shares with Larry, building a shared relation beyond their both growing up in this neighborhood. These such relational connections that Mr. Baro makes demonstrate one of Uncle Nat's points, which is the value of Nima's social formation and the neighborly relations enabled through Nima's intense and saturated growth.

Hajia Mariam Salifu: Small spaces and gendered community space¹²

Hajia Mariam Salifu, Larry, and I sit in blue plastic chairs, in the internal courtyard of what she describes to us as her husband's son's compound house. As we talk, Hajia, an older woman, rests her hands in her lap. It is mostly women inside the compound, and they move around and chat with each other while washing clothes and tending to small children. In front of us and centrally located in the courtyard, the green leaves of maturing plants sprout from yellow and blue plastic containers. I read Hajia's status through her title (Hajia indicates she has fulfilled her Muslim duty of making a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia) and that she lives in a compound house owned by her family. I had also learned from Larry that Hajia is president of a community mothers club, through which she runs an urban gardening initiative that has trained more than 250 women. In her own backyard garden, Hajia grows passionfruit, tomato, and kontomire, a dark green leafy vegetable used to make a local soup. "It's very important," she says of her urban gardening, "because there is lack of space in Nima. But with this, you can grow something to get in the little space that you have."

When Hajia came to Nima in 1975, she says, there was more room in the neighborhood to move: "We had lots of space when I come in, lots of space," she says. I ask after some of these places, and she lists names of open spaces that once existed near her home. "The spaces that I know," she laughs. The places were

¹² Hajia Mariam Salifu, interviewed by Victoria and Larry, February 18, 2019 (Accra, Ghana).

known by the activities that took place there, or by their owner: Fili na tuba, an open area where young boys would go to wrestle until one would cry “Na tuba!” [meaning “I surrender!”]. Also Fili Baba Watchman, just behind her house, named after a certain security man who had just two structures on the space, a space the community would then use for events like outdoorings, the naming ceremony for infants. “That time, that place was an open space...when I came here that time, walking in Nima, you can find space,” she says. “Even just behind my place, that place is space. When we had outdoorings, we used to use there.”

Since then, she says, the community around her has become more and more densely populated and built up. In place of those once-open spaces now stand other compound houses, and when residents want to hold events, now they turn to their compound courtyards, or quite commonly, neighborhood streets. “Now as time is going on, there are buildings. You will pass here today, the next two, three months that you come back, something has been built on that place. So it’s changing fast.” Her statement of the shrinking open spaces overlaps with Mr. Baro’s and Uncle Nat’s words, and it is informed by Nima’s expansion and densification, plus these increasing self-organized claims to space for building new structures.

“And it’s residential, like houses, or commercial buildings?” I wonder aloud.

“It can be anything,” she responds. “Like houses, like stores. Like containers. It can be different things.” I ask her how more and more self-built structures, homes, and commercial activities affect the community. “It affects us, you know, it makes the sanitation very poor for one. Because the buildings, they block the water ways. So the sanitation becomes poor, you see, and especially, let me say, when it’s outbreak of fire...It’s a problem. If you call Fire Service and they are coming, what are they going to do to enter? Already we didn’t have access road in the community. And we are also, in the small space that is left, we are also putting rooms, anything, everything, just in the little space we have. So at the end of the day, you can’t even get fresh air. We lack of so many things.”



Image 8. Construction of food selling structure in open space (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

I begin to ask about the children. “I guess for children and young people, it’s maybe the same, for the spaces where they can play?” I pose to her.

“You know, hmm,” she says, thinking for a moment. “If you came here by, let’s say, four o’clock, you will see them playing just behind my window. How can you stop them, but if somebody [inside the house] is not well, they don’t have anywhere to play.” As she speaks, I imagine children, playing their games, jumping, shouting, laughing at each other, next to the window of someone sick and in need of quiet and rest. “And they want somewhere to play because they are children. So it also affects them.”

“And you talked about how people may set up structures like containers, their buildings,” I say. “When it comes to the ability that someone has to just come set up a structure. Is there any difference between a woman wanting to set up a structure, or a man setting up a structure, or anyone can come and do it?” I ask.

Anyone can come and do it, but with the landlord,” Hajia says. “You can’t come and build without the knowledge of the landlord or paying anything to the landlord. If

you just come and do it, no, the landlord won't accept it. But maybe they will give chance to come - the children of the landlord, or the grandchildren of the landlord. They are doing it." I understand Hajia here to be saying that before anyone can build on someone's property, that person requires the landlord's permission and provides payment, too. As Mr. Baro mentions in the previous section, these original landlords established years ago their tenure and documented claims to Nima land. According to Hajia, now in many cases, it is these landlords' children and grandchildren who now manage the properties, and who are often willing to rent and sell spaces for various uses to earn a profit.

I share that on my way to the SOI office in the afternoons, I usually pass a mosque where I see and greet a group of middle-aged and older men who gather, sit, and chat among themselves on a tiled bench. Yet I rarely see women of that age who similarly gather to sit, and chat leisurely, I say.

Hajia laughs. "I understand you. You know the mosque, the men used to call azana for prayers. And maybe they're less...women are too busy fighting for livelihood, you know? We don't have time to relax. Even to rest. Even to rest, women don't have time to rest. That's why when you grow up a little bit, you can't stay all the time, since you are struggling, struggling, struggling, struggling all the way...The woman will force themselves. No matter how I'm tired, I will fight and find something to take home. But the man, it depends. It depends. So, they [women] have never come to rest, women don't have time to rest."

When women do gather in such community spaces, it is usually around their commercial activities, she explains. As vendors in markets, at the street or pavement, installed at their stalls, kiosks, and tables: Talking, chatting, laughing, while busy working. "Still, the person is working," she points out. "In Nima, we know most of us are in poverty, and the mother can struggle to get money for the child in the morning to eat and in the afternoon for school, for cooking and at the night...Women don't have time to waste. It's true. Because she's thinking how the children can eat in the evening, go to school in the morning. So how can you rest? You wake up early in the morning, go and sell, come back in the evening, come and cook, still cooking, fetching water, cleaning things, washing things, time. The little time that you have to go and sleep, waiting for another day to set up."

Across Ghana's cities, including Accra, women comprise the vast majority of street and market vendors, for whom the street and similar community spaces are an essential commercial resource for livelihood (Budlender, 2011). Hajia's experience

reflects this larger reality, and she shows that Nima women bear a substantial portion of domestic responsibilities in their households, while also contributing to household finances. These work and household demands also take up their time, reducing their availability to be at leisure. This indicates how the gendered realities of these spaces, where women's visibility in community space is oriented toward different purposes than men, takes place (Thiel & Stasik, 2016).

Hajia then turns our attention to the porosity of the AMA and community surveillance, management, and regulation of space in the neighborhood, which enables possibilities for claiming and constructing in these spaces. "What I'm saying is the AMA, the law enforcement, you know, I don't think that our laws are enforced. The laws are there, but to enforce the law, we have to do that," she says. I ask if the AMA is not enforcing from the top, whether this gap lends power to individuals over these spaces. "Everyone is doing what they like," Hajia responds. "If I know that I have a little place, I want to sell this thing and I'll get money, I just build it and sell it and get my money. We don't think about each other." Her statement corresponds with Mr. Baro's description of early Nima, where he describes residents' early processes of selling land for self-organized building. Both indicate a lack of planning, whether in terms of indigenous approaches or via colonial or post-independent administrations. Here, Hajia also points to residents' individualistic approaches, a turning away from communal considerations for a shared spatial experience and benefit.

She gives an example. "You know the small space that I have in front of my house, so many people are coming for it, so many are asking [to rent the space]," she says. Most recently, she continues, it was a young woman who wanted to set up a small business sewing clothes. As caretaker for this house, Hajia says she wants to preserve this space, although small. "This is where the children are playing," she says.

Hajia Salifu speaks from her position as an older, established woman also invested in supporting women and children in the her community. While her experiences and observations overlap with Mr. Baro and Uncle Nat's comments concerning the decreasing amount of open spaces, she also brings additional perspective. Like Mr. Baro, she describes how residents work through individual agreements with landlords and operate outside city planning frameworks or communal considerations to build structures that take over community space. Yet she points to how these building activities also hinder the access of needed sanitation infrastructure, emergency services, community gatherings, and children's play.

These building activities take over once-open spaces, shifting community gatherings and children's play to the spaces of streets and compound courtyards. She also describes how community space can be deeply gendered: Men are typically more able to occupy and gather for leisure. For women, whose household demands leave less time for leisure, their presence in community space often overlaps with their work, particularly commercial activities. For children, whose presence is often circumscribed by adults' usage of space, Hajia speaks directly to protecting a small remaining space for them to play in her compound, against commercial demands. As she illustrates, in this context where neither the AMA nor community enforcement can mitigate residents' demands for building in community space, it is through her position as compound caretaker that she is able to protect a space for children.

Madame Abiba Suleiman: The everydayness of claiming space¹³

Madame Abiba Suleiman lives in the same compound as Hajia Salifu and has lived in Nima since 2008. Like Hajia Salifu, Madame Suleiman came from Kumasi and works on various health programs that support women and children in the community. After our interview, Larry took me to a small community hospital where Madame Suleiman works, which services pregnant women and new mothers. We sit down again inside the interior courtyard of the compound in the plastic chairs, this time with Larry between us. His bodily location also represents a communicative one, as he performs the labor of translating between Madame Suleiman's Hausa and my English to enable our conversation. Near us, small children are playing, jumping around, laughing, yelling at each other. And two women, their eye on their children, are also cleaning and talking to one another.

Madame Suleiman starts immediately. Without Larry or me asking a question, she turns to Larry and launches into Hausa. When she finishes, he turns to me. "She was saying that it's a problem, the way people are encroaching [claiming] the spaces illegally," he says. "It's a big problem, and you cannot see this anywhere [else] - it's only Nima that they are fans of you know, indiscipline. She was saying that previously, you can stand here and even, you know, view Kanda Highway, but now, it's not like that." I picture the Kanda Highway, which separates Nima from the middle-class Kanda Estates, perhaps a five-minute walk from where we were sitting.

¹³ Madame Abiba Suleiman, interviewed by Victoria and Larry, February 19, 2019 (Accra, Ghana)

“So she was even thinking that if not because of God’s divine intervention, God loves people so much, what if now there’s a fire outbreak? How can the Fire Service come into the community and quench the fire?” he says. Here and throughout this interview, Larry uses the English word “encroach” as he interprets Madame Suleiman’s framings as to how people “claim space” in Nima.¹⁴

I start to ask a question, but stop as Madame Suleiman proceeds to speak to Larry again; he turns to her, listening. Madame Suleiman rests her hands in her lap, and from time to time, she gestures with them, emphasizing something. When she finishes, Larry turns to me, saying: “She was saying that because of this encroachment [claiming space], now there’s no space. So if a pregnant woman is about to deliver, you cannot carry her. Sometimes, too, she cannot walk. The way the encroachment [claiming space] is, taxis too cannot come to the community. So the distance the woman walks from the house to the roadside, either the mother will lose her life, or she will get discouraged,” he says.

I think with this situation. “This way that she’s describing Nima,” I begin, “is this how Nima has been since she arrived 11 years ago?” He nods his head, turning to her. As they speak, he nods to her too, at one point agreeing with something she says. When she finishes, he turns to me, saying that in her perspective, while hygiene and sanitation have improved, residents’ encroachments into [claiming] open spaces, streets, and pavements had worsened. Her and Hajia’s comments on hygiene and sanitation bring layered perspectives. While Hajia, speaking from her 40-something years living in Nima, specifically points to how the expansion of spatial claims and building in open spaces stymied sanitation infrastructure improvements in that time, Madame Salifu sees improvements within her shorter time frame of residence.

Larry continues his interpretation: “Because every single space you see right now, before you go and come back, somebody has encroached on [claimed] it. Either in the community or in the street. And AMA and the authorities are seeing it, but they pretend like they don’t know what’s going on. So that is a problem. The encroachment [claiming space] is everywhere. She says even at the back of this

¹⁴ It is after this conversation, when I am in the writing process of this thesis, that I ask Larry about Madame Suleiman’s usage of this term “encroachment,” and he confirms that this is his own word choice. More precisely, he says to me, she refers in Hausa to “claiming space.” For this interview, I maintain his original interpretation (“encroachment), but also add his later clarification (“claiming space”) in brackets.

house,” he points in the direction of the very space Hajia had indicated the previous day, “if not because of Hajia, like people are trying to encroach [claim space], but she is very strong. She fights against it. If not, by now, you’ll not even see any space. Because hairdresser will come in, seamstress will come in, barber will come in. Now, even those who want a store with their goods, they will come in. Some who even want to sleep, they will just mount a kiosk, and they will encroach [claim space] here.” While this reality of residents occupying and taking up open space is common across the city, Madame’s sharing demonstrates her lived experience of this reality in Nima.

“Wow,” I say in response. Her description helps me better understand Hajia’s words to us, about the small space she protects and preserves for the children of the compound to play. Before I can form another question, Madam Suleiman begins speaking to Larry again, a long story to which he listens, nods patiently, and then he turns to me. “She was also saying that, because of this indiscipline, now every Wednesday there are times when everyone sells in the market. Market is for selling, the street is for vehicles. But now - even five years back, she fought against it with the Queen Mother,” he says, using the term for the woman market leaders.¹⁵ “They [Madame Suleiman and other community women] went to the roadside, they took to the AMA, that they [AMA] should evacuate everybody on the street so that [vendors and hawkers] should use the built market. Those on the street are enjoying selling on the street, because if somebody wants to buy onions, they just want to buy on the street, they don’t want to go into the [built] market. And now it’s becoming worse. Now, human beings and cars are rubbing shoulders every Wednesday, which is dangerous.”

Larry’s interpretation of “human beings and cars rubbing shoulders” seems apt: The street, pavement, even the median are choked on Wednesdays, with selling, buying, vendors’ plastic mats and tables and customers’ foot traffic. He continued: “They sell on the street faster than in the market....They are enjoying, so they don’t even look at the danger of what they’re doing. If a vehicle fails to brake, it’s going to kill a lot of people. It’s happened before.”

I recall something Hajia said concerning the different ways men, women, and children use community space in Nima. “Larry,” I begin. “We were talking with Hajia

¹⁵ Queen Mothers are market leaders who control different sections of the market, by commodity, and possess power and leadership roles to settle disputes between vendors and to engage with city and national authorities (Clark, 1997).

about women's - how do you say, the ways that different types of people are able to use the space. Hajia was describing for us how mostly for women, it's around their livelihood activities like street vending, for example. Whereas for men, you'll often see them in leisure activities, that sort of thing. Are there other ways that she has seen or experienced women using the space?" He interprets the question to Madame Suleiman, and after listening to her response, interprets that for me in English. Her response focuses around her desires to organize health-related community engagements, but the inability due to lack of spaces for these activities. "The old people cannot walk long distances, so they lose a lot of opportunities. If the space is available, they can do community engagement activities like health screening, durbar [popular term used for a major outdoor public event or ceremony], a lot of things. Because of lack of space, they have to move [these activities] to where the space is, other communities, and those people will benefit, not people in this community."

"Because normally the space that you would use is an existing open space, or a building, or...?" I ask.

Larry takes a moment before responding. "There's a space just here, when we were young, that's where we played football," Larry now speaks from his own experience, having also grown up in this area. "That's where anything takes place. That's where we all play. But now, people encroached [claimed the space], now there's no space."

Madame Suleiman speaks to Larry in Hausa, he nods, and then turns to me. "She's saying that the remaining spaces in the community are these animal rearing zones. The owners use their power to occupy the space. You see, those rearing cattle, even if you come here at Eid al-Adha, they sacrifice there. You'll see that." I recall two spaces close to the SOI office, where cattle owners keep their animals in pens. The cattle, fenced in between the open Nima gutter, street vendors, and buildings, have little space to roam. Madame Suleiman's example reminds me that Mallam Futa, who founded Nima, was a cattle herder who selected this once-expansive and open area to keep cattle (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2008).

Madame speaks to Larry again, and then he turns to me. "She said that right now, if an armed robber comes to your house and doesn't succeed, and you shout 'Criminal!' he'll just pass here, and you'll not see him again." While speaking, he moved his hands together, from one side to the other, like a thief searching for a hiding place produced through multiple spatial occupations, and evading capture.

“Yeah, he’s close, but he can just hide somewhere, then you can’t see him. So because of encroachment [claiming space], we face all these problems.”

I take a breath. “If you clear the space, will it become safer?” I ask.

Larry interprets, then responds: “She said there is not political equality [to clear the space]. So even today, if most of the people agree that there must be a demolition so that they must have a space, some, or one particular person will disagree. Because of his political influence, if you dare, you will lose their job. Even if you...”

“If you dare?” I ask. Larry nods his head. “Yes. If you dare attempt to demolish that structure, you’ll lose your job...So this political influence, it’s influencing the people in the community. I might agree to a demolition for us to have a space. Someone else, someone who is very very strong [holds strong political authority or power], will say no and the [political] party will also back them. So that’s where the [demolition] exercise will stop.”

Madame jumps in, speaking to Larry in Hausa. When she finishes, he says: “She said where she’s coming from in Kumasi, once there was an encroachment [claimed space] behind the house of a king, and the king told them that he wanted to see north, south, east, and west. So he demolished all the encroachments [claimed spaces], and there was nothing, no trouble. But in Nima, *hmm!* We have different political parties! If you demolish my house today, tomorrow I’ll also come into power and that’s where the confusion will come. So we use political powers to intimidate others, and each other.”

“And this informs which structures get demolished,” I say, following him.

“Yes. That’s why Nima is not developing - because we’re all influenced by political parties. So when my party is in power, I have the power. When my party loses power, then I also lose power. So there’s a lot of retaliations between each other in the community.”

Our conversation with Madame Suleiman overlaps with our previous conversations, as well as brings into view new ways of understanding Nima’s spatial evolution and the complexities produced by residents’ everyday occupations of space. These spatial occupations, in the form of building and commercial activities in open space, present multiple dangers, from fire hazards to commercial vendors who block road traffic. She also points to the complicated local politics, political affiliations, uneven

power, and influences that limit residents' and the AMA's ability to halt these practices. The experiences that she shares demonstrates how residents' self-organized building and occupation of space works around even the AMA's influence, and that residents' uneven access to political power, and aspirations towards power, limit their actions in the present to address the pattern of residents' claiming, building, and occupying space.

Honorable Shareau Tajudeen: Politics and practices of claiming space¹⁶

Honorable Shareau Tajudeen served as assembly member for the East Ayawaso constituency of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly for more than two decades. In his role as a local political authority, he facilitated neighborhood-level projects and interventions, from constructing water points and public toilets to community cleanups clearing choked gutters, littered streets, and sidewalk pavements. Throughout his time in local government he resided in Nima, his neighborhood constituency, embedding him in the everyday politics of space in the constituency he served. Larry and I arrive to his home, a large compound family house with an interior courtyard, on a Thursday afternoon. We sit down together on a long wooden bench, with Honorable on my one side and Larry on the other. After introductions, our conversation begins along the thread of colonialism and its impacts on space. I share how I connect Ghana, where we sit together, and my family's country, Nigeria, through shared colonial histories, specifically, the ways colonialism has impacted space through planning and urban management. I wonder about any local spatial understandings that existed before the British came, that we should connect to contemporary ways that Nima residents exist in and use space. However, Honorable, speaking from his long-time role as political authority and working through government processes, focuses on the political work to be done now, which he sees as changing residents' mindsets to correspond with existing city's plans.

“Sometimes we start with the way the area was demarcated, he says. “People just building haphazardly without plan. So I say that it's a development ahead of the planning which causes all these things. Because you are supposed to plan before you do that. So if you fail to plan, that is where this thing will happen. For a century, more than 50, 60 years ago, people were just buying the land, they put up the buildings without anything. But if you go into reality now, there is a *map*” - he

¹⁶ Honorable Shareau Tajudeen, interviewed by Victoria and Larry, February 14, 2019 (Accra, Ghana). I maintain this title Honorable in recognition of his work as a political authority, and because it is how he was commonly referred to throughout Nima.

stresses the word map - “a development map that is Nima community. But because people were not all that educated, they didn’t see the danger involved. When you build, you just build without planning,” he says. “This is what we are trying to change, the perception, the people. We cannot continue to live like that. We need to develop,” he adds.

He describes the family households who, as they grow in size, proceed by expanding their own homes to suit: “Sometimes too [it is] because of the way they bring up their children. They have a big family, the whole land, which the land can be used for other purposes.” While speaking, he extends his arm to indicate the extent of the courtyard and compound. “But you can see, look at my house - very big, mmm?” I look around, and Larry does too, humming sounds of agreement. It’s true: I can count at least eight different ground-floor dwellings in the large compound, forming a rectangle to the internal courtyard in which we sit. “There’s another house, too,” Honorable continues. “Maybe the land, it can take more than the way we built it. You can build and go up [additional floors].”

“Like five or six stories,” Larry chimes in. “Yes!” exclaims Honorable in agreement. “But because we just build like that, without planning.” Like Honorable’s compound house, many of the compound homes in Nima are built as single-story dwellings, with households extending their dwellings at the ground level rather than constructing additional stories.

“So a part of the problem that we face now is there’s no space. There is no space, and the population is growing. Formerly, when our grandfathers moved to this place, it wasn’t this house that you have seen, it was just a room. Also when we were coming up, we were also building for a family, so people built up small small. You can see now the [leftover] space is too small.” Larry laughs in agreement. Honorable continues: “Formerly, it was very spacious. But now because the family are coming up, there is no space, you cannot move anywhere.” Within the compound, two men are at work, mixing and laying concrete not far from us. The *scrape-scrape-scrape* of their metal shovels on pavement punctuate and materialize our conversation about continued and incremental building processes. I imagine each dwelling in the compound home to a family unit, part of Honorable’s large, extended, and multigenerational family, all connected to a shared progenitor who acquired this land and built that first room Honorable mentions.

“But now because the family are coming up, there is no space, you cannot move anywhere. Even you have to pay some big man before you can acquire any new

space, any new land. Very powerful people in the community. So people started to encroach anywhere that they can. So I don't see it as a problem where people are encroaching, encroachment in places, the small small small houses, people are adding to their houses. It's a challenge, it's not a problem, it's a challenge to the community." I notice that Honorable employs this term "encroachment," which originates from British colonial planning regulations¹⁷, and that this term also came up in Larry and my conversation with Madame Suleiman.

"So now that the original landlords are dead and gone, now the children are coming up. Now, it's not the children, it's the great grandchildren who are coming up. So, the population is coming up more. People started to say, 'Why can't I do some extension [of my house]?' You see here for example," he says, using his hand to gesture toward a dwelling unit to his own left, "here is our bathroom. But now one of my brothers who is staying over here" - he points in the direction of the two men bent over, mixing and shoveling cement - "he is also looking for bathroom, he has to extend his room here to cover this space. You see? That is how the encroachment happens. Because of no space," he says. I nod my head in understanding.

¹⁷ "Encroachment" is a British colonial planning term introduced to problematize urban dwellers' occupation, construction of buildings and structures, and activity on streets and spaces that took place without colonial administrative authorization (Griffith, 1903, p. 820). Accra's 1958 city plan, produced one year after independence, was written by two British architects, and labeled a wide range of self-organized activities of residents as "encroachments" and other "non-conforming uses": Vehicle drivers claiming the edges of main roads to park their vehicles on the outer parts of town, young boys employing open lands and fields for their "makeshift" football pitches, residents self-organizing housing in the Nima "slum" neighborhood and in crown lands, and individuals putting up "slum housing" around urban commercial zones and large workshops. Around markets and lorry parks, street vendors and hawkers' trading activities were framed as an "unofficial 'overflow'" from the government-built markets onto the adjacent streets and throughout the central commercial area (Trevallion & Hood, 1958, pp. 23, 46, 58).

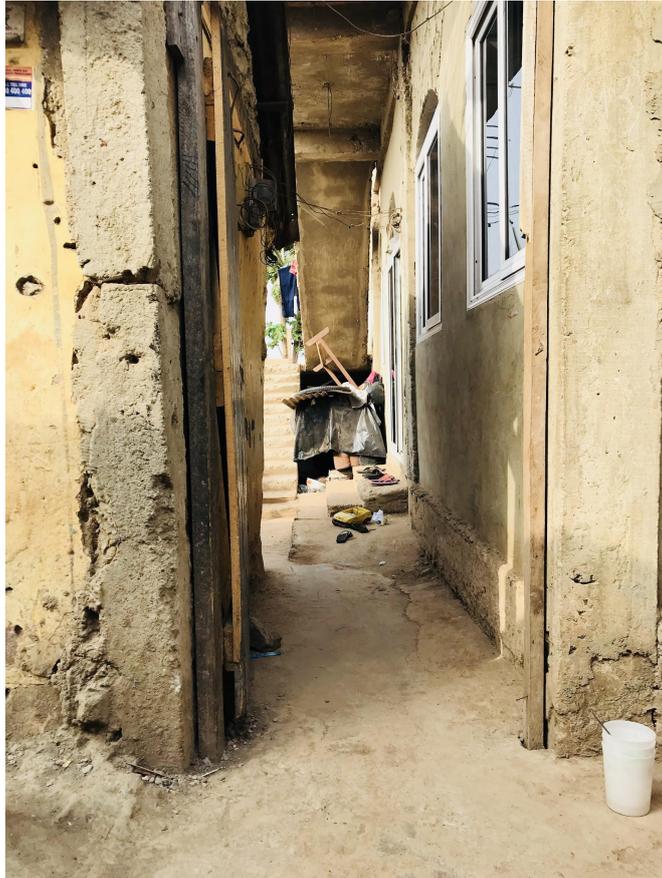


Image 9. Residents' extensions of their dwellings narrow a passageway (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

“So if I see some small space here, I bring something and put it there,” he said. “I quite remember we had a challenge with somebody who brought a big container and put it on the land,” he begins. Here Honorable refers to the increasingly common practice in which people repurpose metal containers into structures, often for commercial activities like small provision shops (Osseo-Asare, 2020). “We were looking for a space to put the transformer to supply electricity....we needed somewhere to put the transformer to supply light to the community, but just in this small space, people will put up a business,” he says and describes how he had to have the structure demolished in order to provide electricity in the area.

“Sometimes too because of our authorities, we call them, but they don’t care,” Honorable continues. “They just think about the revenue that they’ll be collecting, so they don’t care whether you’re going to sell, they don’t care. They’ll come and say, ‘Oh you put that there, ok. Just give us our revenue.’ That is what they think. So these people have opportunity to put up these things because they know whenever they [AMA] come, they’ll just come and pay and go.”

“The encroachment of lands is a challenge even to the government itself. People are encroaching, encroachment is too high. So any small space, somebody will claim it. Now you know what they do? Now, if you go to Kanda Highway right now, you’ll see somebody may bring container. Just put it there, leave it, and go. If somebody will talk...” he begins to laugh and Larry joins, sharing the knowledge between them. I wait, and once they finish laughing, Honorable continues. “He can leave that [container] waiting to see whether somebody will come, or whether an authority will come and say something, for some time. If nothing happens, it becomes his land. He owns that place, because ‘I put my container there.’”

“First,” Larry adds: “Because that person had put their container there first.”

“So the place is for me,” Honorable says. “Since I came, I improved the land,” Larry says, adding to Honorable’s statement. “I’m the owner now.”

I am wowed. “By the nature of having put something there...?” I wonder, my voice trailing off. “...*first*,” Larry adds again, emphasizing the temporal importance for a second time. “He’s very smart.”

“Some people are very, very smart,” Honorable echoes. “That is how they get space.”

Larry continues: “Even when he dies, his family will come and claim that space.” I look at him with wide eyes. It is only later that I will realize, reading Sackeyfio’s (2012) work, that this politics of claiming a space in contemporary Nima echoes many local indigenous spatial practices, where an individual can claim an unoccupied space, and by setting down a structure or using that space first, claim that space for themselves presently and to pass down to family members in the future. As Sackeyfio writes, these socially produced rights to land “were regulated by codes of conduct rather than proprietary laws that connoted notions of individual ownership” (Sackeyfio, 2012, p. 297).

“They’ll take the land,” Honorable says. “Even after his death. They’ll say, ‘This place is mine.’”

“They’ll say, ‘This place is for my brother, he’s the one who put his container there, so you can’t claim it. Where from you?’” Larry says.

“No documents!” Honorable exclaims. “But you go to court - he will take you to court too, and if you don’t take care, he will win the case.”

“I quite remember when we had a fire outbreak in Nima here,” Honorable says. “The ambulance and then the Fire Service, before they would even reach the place, it was so late. It was late,” he repeats again. I widen my eyes, imagining the route Larry had guided me through from the SOI office to here; for much of our walk, the only access ways were lungus, the name residents use, from Hausa language, for the alleyways and pedestrian pathways between homes and buildings. In Nima, many of these lungus are not wide enough for a car to pass through, let alone a fire truck. “They bring about three, four fire [fire trucks], but it didn’t reach there because the way, there was no access roads to the place. So it was our youth who were there to organize and bring water,” Honorable says. I imagine the time it would have taken for the fire trucks to arrive, to organize logistics, for the young men to step in, taking turns carrying heavy buckets of water with haste, and the destroyed property and memories likely lost in that fire - furniture, clothes, family photos, children’s school books.

I turn to Honorable. “Yesterday, some of Larry and his colleagues, we were having a conversation about risk, about what you’ve highlighted. That if you’ve extended your building, if you’ve added a container, it’s an investment. But at the same time, it’s a risk, because the space where you decide to claim is not really - is it yours? It’s not that it’s yours in the same way that this land we sit on is your land,” I say to Honorable.

“Yes,” he says in agreement. I continue. “So there always seems to be the risk that it may be demolished, that it will be removed. This is a financial risk that one has to bear, yes?”

“Yes, yes,” he says, nodding. “People don’t think about that. Just to survive.”

“They’re thinking more short term?” I ask. “Yes,” he responds. “When the people come [landowner with government documentation], it will take about 20 years to come. So let me put it there. That’s the thinking of people,” he says.

“Which is interesting,” I say, “because you talked before that there’s a plan, but that sometimes when the city makes plans, it’s a long term plan...”

“It’s a long term plan,” he said.

“...but sometimes we who are living here, we are living in now,” I finish.

“We don’t go on the way it was planned,” he says. “So people build haphazardly, the way they like.”

“This also makes us think about this concept of ownership,” I say to him. “It seems that, sometimes the way we are taught in school, either you own something or you don’t. But the way you are talking and other people have also mentioned, I feel it also shows ownership is more - is it like a spectrum, do you know what I mean? The power one can have to claim a space is something else. You are talking about if you decide to extend your building into the pavement. It’s there, it’s not that it’s your space, you don’t own the space - is it that by the nature of extending into the space, that you’ve claimed it, it’s now yours?” I ask.

“Yes,” he says. “Let me give you a typical example. When we are going to construct this main road, Kanda Highway. People’s houses were demolished, and they were paid cash, they collected that. The ones that built those homes, they are still claiming it. They build on it. They will say, ‘Where are we going? I’m not going anywhere.’ They built on the *saaaame* land that they paid. They’re still there.”

“Wait, so they built something there, after it was demolished?” I ask.

“Yes,” he says.

“They now came back?” I ask again.

“They came back,” he says. “Government paid them outright to go and build another house somewhere. So they [government] demolished. The remaining space here, the owner will come and claim that this is his house...Right now, when you ask them to move, they will say ‘Pay me.’”

“Wow,” I say. “I guess I’m becoming aware of this idea of how you can claim something and how you...”

“And have it,” he say.

“And have it,” I repeat. I turned to Larry and then back to Honorable. “You talk about how you pay the AMA, and they leave you alone, it’s almost like that’s rent. It’s almost like the AMA legitimizes your claim.”

“Yes,” Honorable says. Larry jumps in: “The houses, they understand that, ‘Ok, I can violate their law, you come and talk. If AMA comes, the end result is, you just give them some money. Then they ignore him. But then if one day there’s fire outbreak, or someone dies. How can we take the person out? That’s the problem.”

“It’s what Larry is saying,” Honorable says. “We’ve experienced it down here. People build just close to the road. One day, a certain man died in the house. Where to pass the dead body was a problem. We had to use somebody’s window. We opened that window before we can bring out the dead body. There was no space in the house to take the dead body outside. So we have to open somebody’s window to take out the dead body. Some people had claimed the outside part.”

Honorable gives another example. “People brought their old cars which are no longer working and park them on the street. If you go to Larry’s office you see how people were bringing all the scraps [scrap metal to the pavement]. We try to remove them from that place. We were not able to do it. We went there with the police. They will just find a way, and in a week’s time, they come back. So the place is very, the road is too small. So in this neighborhood, you can’t have space to park, it is because of the way people park their vehicles that they’re no more using. We need to remove *aaaaaall* and give space,” Honorable says, extending the word “all” for emphasis. “All these are challenges and people are so happy to stay here. They don’t want to move. Even if you give one billion Ghana cedis, they still want to live here. He doesn't want to move to Kasoa or go to Madina, no no no.”

“As we know,” I started, “the AMA has its own grand visions for the city, but then there is also the reality on the ground. So there always seem to be this contention, right?”

“Even in your own land that you want to develop, before they even give you permit for you to develop your own land, it will take time. So they are also part of it,” he said, stressing the “they” to emphasize their complicity.

“You go for permit, they will say where is your permit? You go and apply for the permit. It will take you time. Now the [prices for] building materials are also going high, so people don’t wait for the permit. They will just go head, do it, whilst they

are pursuing the permit. Because they have to give you time before you build and your permit is not...and you know this money, if it's with you, if you don't take care, you'll spend it all. So you say, 'Let me try to start building small. By the time they bring the permit out, I will finish.' So there are a lot of people who are building, but they don't have a permit. They don't have a permit. So the authorities, the city authorities are also a part of it, they are also part of the problem. If you hire for a permit, and then they fast track it and give it to you, you will also pursue that. But if you see you are going to wait, you will just come and write STOP WORK. Now people even write it on their own: "STOP WORK". They don't wait for authorities to come." My mind flashes to so many of the partially completed buildings I have seen in the city throughout the years, the red text in capital letters, with corresponding dates for notice and demolition.

I start to ask why individuals would do this, but then I realize: "Ahhhhh," I say, "so that the AMA thinks they have come and done it, so they will leave them alone."

"Yes," Honorable responds. "They won't come, they will leave you alone."

"People are smart," I say, echoing Honorable and Larry's words from earlier.

"They're smart," he responds. They'll just come and write on their own: STOP WORK. So when the authorities come, they will say, 'Oh we have been to this place already.'" So they will leave. I know one guy who said that if you write that, that is where you are working, to feel comfortable."

"Wow....." I say.

"Right." Honorable says. "That is what people are doing."

"So the system really is not working," I remark. "In fact, people are using the system."

"Yes!" Honorable exclaims. "People are using the system."

With my last question, I try to bring our discussion back to children and young people. "What are the ways you see children and young people claim space?" I ask.

Honorable laughs. "You know, let's say for this house, if there is a small space behind the house the space belongs to us, you'll see the grandchild and

grandfather who used to sit there. Gradually, gradually, they [the young one] start bringing his friends coming there, sitting there, smoking everything there. Before you realize, the place belongs to them. They will claim the space.” These spaces, which locals call “bases,” are community spaces to hang out, most often for boys, young men and adult men (Cassiman, 2018).

“And then there’s abaka, I think they have some connection with one of the traditional leaders. They will just go round, see if there is any place where nobody is doing something, and they will claim the land. If they sell it, they will come and give the traditional leaders some money and keep the rest for themselves. So the area guy who is the boss over there, he will say ‘Oh, this is for we the youth. We have this place, so we want to sell it.’ And they will sell it. Nobody will talk. If you are coming to develop it, nobody will come and tell you not to. Sometimes, they come with weapons. So what do you do? You just leave them. So the youth can claim that place. Even at Kanda, where they play football. They know the land belongs to [Ministry of] Works and Housing there. Works and Housing people came to develop that place, but those youth were playing football, they say nobody should come and develop it. And until today, nobody was there. They said, ‘This place is our land, this is where we play football.’ So, they will claim the land. They will claim the land.”

Later, I ask Larry, and he clarifies that these “youth” and “area guys” that Honorable mentions would be young men, around 20 years old and above. Sometimes referred to as land guards, these young men from the area are enlisted or take it upon themselves to act as informal security guards to influence the sale of plots of land (Ehwi & Mawuli, 2021). These young men are quite often out-of-school and unemployed. In a context of densely populated neighborhoods with high land rents and where land ownership is unclear, operating as land guards presents an option for these young men who may have no or few other income-generating opportunities (Darkwa & Attuquayefio, 2021).

In this conversation, Honorable speaks from his position as a former member of parliament with a long history of working within government processes supporting material and social improvements in Nima. Through his observations and perspectives, he brings additional layers and context to residents’ spatial relations and practices in Nima, particularly how residents and even the AMA participate in the production of community space through means outside “formal” planning processes. Honorable uses the term “encroachment” to frame residents’ everyday practices of claiming, occupying, and building in community space – describing, alongside the other elders, a consistent practice in Nima. In using this term, he

draws on a colonial planning terminology whose usage persists in contemporary times. He speaks of encroachment both as a “challenge” while also demonstrating it to be a popular spatial logic and mode that brings into relation seemingly all of Nima’s residents: those who claim and build in space, often before acquiring permits; the AMA officials that look the other way once fees are paid; landlords; young men who collaborate with traditional leaders or act on their own to influence the sale of spaces (or to prevent land sales and construction altogether); youth who set up bases; and the wide range of residents impacted by all of these practices in both everyday life and emergencies. These practices of residents’ claiming, occupying, and building in space and this term “encroachment” also bring into relation indigenous, colonial, and post-independent processes and conceptions of the use of space, which continue to rub up against each other in the current moment. The persistence of indigenous practices and logics in acquiring and inhabiting space interact with the colonial origins of Ghana’s planning approaches and the incomplete consolidation of post-independent planning, whose gaps and weaknesses create opportunities for everyday subversions.

Initially in our conversation, Honorable attributes residents’ practices of building outside of city planning to being “not all that educated,” and it is toward the end of our conversation that, drawing on thinking Larry offers, Honorable acknowledges these residents are “smart” in how they claim and acquire spaces, even outwitting the AMA in its own planning processes. Within the incompleteness and uncertainty of the city’s planning processes, residents’ establish their own seeming codes of conduct, weighing the risks of their investments in claiming and occupying on spaces, attuning to short time horizons and navigating planning processes to produce their claims to space. Yet even with these multiple and varied challenges within residents’ claims to space, Nima’s residents remain here. As Honorable Tajudeen says at one point in the interview, “All of these challenges and people are so happy to stay here. They don’t want to move. Even if you give one billion Ghana Cedis, they still want to live here.”

Conclusion

This chapter provides a background context of the evolution of Nima and its evolving spatial landscape over time, told through five elders’ situated (hi)stories of the neighborhood and city. In this chapter, I present elders’ situated narratives contextualizing Nima through multiple, overlapping, and diverging standpoints grounded in their lived experiences within the neighborhood, in line with my research objective to open new spaces of knowledge production through this thesis. In addition, the conversation with Uncle Nat challenges the stereotype of

Nima as a “migrant” community while also locating Accra within expansive and enduring histories of migration, the slavery and colonialism projects, and demonstrates the city’s connections to global Blackness in line with my research objective to situate Nima within a global Black geographies frame.

From Nima’s initial founding as a small village located beyond the scope of colonial territorial control, the forces of urbanization, demands for land, housing, and employment in the context of land commodification and changing and porous planning controls have dramatically shifted this neighborhood. By the time Nima was finally incorporated into the city of Accra around the time of independence in 1957, it had become a densely packed neighborhood whose spatial formation was largely driven by self-organized construction. The elders’ statements, stories, and complaints shape an understanding of residents’ everyday provisional practices of claiming space as a dominant spatial logic and mode through which Nima’s community spaces are produced. This ranges from residents’ set up of commercial activities at the street, pavement, and open space, to building and extending dwellings into lungus between homes and buildings, to inhabiting unclaimed and “open” spaces. Rather than presenting Nima as a neighborhood “gone wrong” (Agyei-Mensah and Owusu 2012), this chapter situates Nima as an evolving neighborhood shaped through global and local processes as well as residents’ everyday needs and practices.

These conversations demonstrate that Nima’s growth takes place within the context of multiple forces. The Nima elders point to the spatial challenges in their neighborhood, associated with residents’ practices of claiming space, a lack of planning (whether through indigenous, colonial, or post-independent governance), the AMA’s inconsistent management and regulation of space, and residents’ further co-option of AMA tactics in claiming, inhabiting, and using space. Usage, rather than titled ownership, still forms the popular spatial logic and mode through which spatial claims are made and understood in Nima, and even “legitimate” claims to legal ownership are threatened by residents’ challenges and subversions, both for landlords, and for the AMA.

Uncle Nat cites the crucial influence of land commodification, and this theme then runs through several of the interviews. An additional and related theme that emerges is the aspirational desires voiced in some of the interviews: That Nima might become like the affluent Airport Residential neighborhood, as Fatimatu asks, or become like Dubai, as Mustafa questions, or to more generally shift from its current single-story pattern of multi-generational compound houses to high-rise

apartment living, which Honorable postulates, appear embedded within the seeming inevitability proposed by global modernity and its notions of space and unilinear development trajectory. Many of these desires seem placed within hopes to move Nima along the ladder of global modernity and its global capitalist underpinnings (Ogunyankin, 2019). These aspirations sit amidst Nima residents' constant and practical search for opportunities to make ends meet, which informs so many of their demands for space, and also rubs up against earnest desires to maintain spaces for the non-capitalist communal life and sociality, which Hajia Salifu and Madame Suleiman highlight as so necessary.

Within the context of this thesis, these conversations yield deep insights into Nima as a changing neighborhood, and set up an understanding for how residents' claims and occupancies of community spaces will frame children's experience of these sites (the focus of Chapter 5). For now, in this chapter the elders illustrate, from their own perspectives, how once-open spaces for wrestling and football are now occupied with buildings and structures, girls and young women's time and space for leisure and play is circumscribed by their domestic responsibilities, and interior spaces within the compound also become an important protected site for children's play and gathering. These conversations also illuminate differences between children and young people's possibilities for space. These contextual understandings of the spatial evolution and realities in Nima are important for the conceptual framework in the following chapter (Chapter 3), which continues this work with residents' perspectives and knowledge, including that of Honorable Shareau Tajudeen, to shape a conceptual understanding from which to analyze children's community space experiences. The understandings produced here are also important for the second empirical chapter (Chapter 5), to contextualize how the SOI students articulate their own experiences of community space as children.

Conceptually framing spatial experience: the human, magic, and racializing assemblages

The Spread-Out (SOI) Initiative office front porch opens up to the world of Nima and its residents: friends and relatives pass by with greetings, associates stop in for meetings, SOI students stop over on their way home from school, parents inquire about the possibilities of registering their kids as SOI students. This small space is a front portal opening up from two large front wooden doors, with a gate wall of decorated cement blocks wrapping around it and a large roof for shade. Here is where we (Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha, and I, along with other SOI team members) eat, talk, debate, gossip, and laugh together. This front porch also emerges as a meaningful epistemological site from which to conceptualize our research work together. From where we sit, this liminal space, in the way it extends from the interior office space and into the exterior neighborhood (Zawadka, 2009), we are in and look out into the world of Nima. Our conversations span planning our activities and designing workshops (workshops that often overflow from the inside office space to the outside office space of the porch). Here, we reflect on our research experiences, and we make meanings of what we learn.



Image 10. Larry (left), Faisal (sitting), Ashraf (standing), and Fatimatu (right) at the SOI front porch (Photo by Victoria Okoye)



Image 11. Larry (left) smiles down from the SOI office porch, with (center) and Ashraf (right) (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

When we converse on this porch, the world around us takes place: Women, men, and children greet and joke together as they pass along the pavement, vendors operate at the pavement, women at the next door chop bar prepare and serve food, the *clank clank clank* of metal against metal as the repairmen next door fix air conditioners and refrigerators. The large open Nima gutter runs along the length of Oku Street in front of the office, and cars honk and motorbikes rumble by. These everyday phenomena surround us and our front porch conversations, grounding us, and remind me of the material, social, and affective ways in which our research is a situated part and in relation with the world around us.

I begin this chapter with the SOI front office porch space and our porch conversations to recognize these as critical sites of discussion and knowledge production from which I develop conceptual tools to frame this research project (McTighe & Haywood, 2018), recognizing the lineages of these such spaces as sites for African communal discourse and Black feminist activism and theorizing. This place - a location for sitting, talking, and coming to know our research within the context of Nima neighborhood - is part of an epistemological approach that enables the conceptual framework for this thesis to take shape from Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha, and my reflections and understandings.



Image 12. View from the SOI office porch (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

In this chapter, I lay the framework for conceptualizing children’s spatial experiences and practices as an assembling of bodies, race (Blackness as genre of the human), affect, materials, space, as well as historical processes and material inequalities. I proceed by elaborating my Black feminist epistemological approach, and then I devote space to one particularly meaningful porch conversation (in the format of long-form transcription), which orients my conceptual engagement for this thesis. Devoting pages to our porch conversation is a careful practice of situating theorizing from within our collaborative engagement and then my subsequent theorizing from that foundation. I take up space for porch conversation in this thesis, and in particular in this chapter on conceptual framing, because the porch and our thinking-doing-reflecting activities there were spaces of conceptual engagement within Nima, a space where our formative conversations took place. As such, I make a deliberate choice to locate authority not just with myself, but also with Larry, Fatimatu, and Mustapha, and then I work through how each of our knowledges, perspectives, and voices inform this conceptual framework. In doing so, I deliberately bring to the fore our interpretations and reflections, and I structure this conceptual framework around the threads of discussion that emerge from our conversations. The porch conversation shows our sometimes shared, sometimes diverging meanings, interpretations, and insights. This space for our porch conversation demonstrates a “connective process through which [our] individual experiences...are transformed into collective consciousness and meaning” (McTighe & Haywood, 2018, p. 29).

Through these conversations, we describe and frame the structural, personally embodied, and relational realities of Nima's conditions, which in turn form a geographic landscape for children's everyday spatial practices. In particular, we build meaning from two statements made by Nima residents during our research process (one whom we interviewed in the previous chapter, the other who is an SOI team member), on the human and on magic. These statements and our reflections serve as meaningful conceptual threads with which I weave a conceptual framework that connects our ideas to academic scholarship on Blackness and antiblackness globally and in Ghana (such as Bowles, 2021; Pierre, 2013, 2020; Moshood, 2019; Holsey, 2008b; Hartman, 2007), the othering of Black peoples in a world structured by our less-than-human status (Walcott, 2014; Wynter, 2003), the uninhabitable (Simone, 2019; McKittrick, 2013) and a relational understanding of the world through racializing assemblages (Weheliye, 2014). This then, comes to shape how I come to know, describe, and analyze children's spatial experiences in the later empirical chapters of this thesis, and draw conclusions to contribute to Black geographic and urban theory.

Black feminist epistemological approach

In this section, I define and elaborate my epistemological approach for this thesis, which takes root in Black (which for me includes both Black African and Black Diasporan) feminism. The starting point from which I know the world - and which concomitantly informs my academic knowing - is from my embodied as well as partial, implicated, and situated perspective, thinking and feeling as a Black (Igbo diasporan of Nigerian and US nationality) woman (Chilisa, 2012; Collins, 1989, 2000; Haraway, 1988). I begin from my own experiences of subjective oppressions as I move in the world in the United States, Ghana, Nigeria, and the UK, relate to others, and seek out theoretical understandings of my/their/our material, structural, and lived circumstances (Kiguwa, 2019; Amoo-Adare, 2013). As I mentioned in the introduction chapter, Fatimatu, Larry, Mustapha and I possess different lived experiences, identities, and positionalities, and we are all situated at our own intersections within the global network of colonial, capitalist, racialized, ethnic, and patriarchal oppressions. These different diasporic heritages, ethnicities, nationalities, and lived experiences shape our Black subjectivities -- between Larry, Fatimatu, and Mustapha born and raised in Ghana (each having origins in another part of the country) and me raised in the diaspora, among many other differences between us -- demonstrate Blackness as variegated and global. Our Blackness exists within a wide multiplicity shaped through diasporic processes, historic accumulation, as lived experiences and racialized subjectivities in a world structured through global white supremacy.

Our coming together is thanks to Spread-Out Initiative's Pan-Africanist ideology through which the organization focuses on building African and Diasporic relations in the space of its office toward pedagogical interventions for children and youth. For Larry, Spread-Out Initiative' founder, this is also part of a shared struggle that emerges from our destinies as people of African heritages. Working across difference enables the deep potential to build meaningful conceptual spaces (Lorde, 1984) grounded in our modes of being, thinking, feeling, and existing in the world. These standpoints, the "experience and lives of [we] marginalized peoples, as [we] understand them" (hooks, 1990, p. 16), provide the valuable starting off point from which we connected years ago, and came together again more recently to begin this research project as knowledge production agenda. As we (Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha, the SOI students and myself) come together in this project, each of us works from our own racialized as Black, and also gendered, classed and otherwise categorized bodies, our own individual sites from which we know and imagine, but also which informs our collaboration and our participatory research practices as we work in relation with each other. Simply said, even within the space we create together to discuss and wrestle with the realities of power dynamics that inform children's spatial experience, we also navigate power dynamics that shape relations with each other.

Our world and knowing our world has been dominantly structured by the imperial white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal episteme (Tamale, 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; hooks, 1994), which centers white western language, ways of knowing and of theorizing, culture and academy both in "global north" and in "global south" contexts. This is intertwined with the violent histories of slavery, colonialism and imperialism, dating from the 15th century to present (Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Smith, 1999; Quijano, 1998). Each of us has been affected by slavery and colonization, related projects in the centuries-long process of (among other things) subjugating racialized as Black bodies and interrupting the transmission of our local knowledges in order to reproduce and expand the logics of imperial white supremacist patriarchy at the center of western modernity (Grosfoguel, 2008; hooks, 1994).

We exist at shared but also disparate intersections of structures of oppression, which produce compounded erasures, and these experiences of subjugation and oppression shape how we experience and interpret our realities (Collins, 1989). We experience these and come to know our worlds through our situatedness in our particular bodies, sociopolitical locations, our lived experience, and our own social

worlds (Oyewumi, 1997; hooks, 1989; Haraway, 1988). Therefore, our production of knowledge is necessarily political: Here, the political, for those of us situated at multiple and intersecting oppressions, and for whom our experiences are often threatened with erasure, means to understand the production of knowledge as holding potential as a process of “re-vision” (hooks, 1989). It is also a critical means of problematizing our locations in western modernity and shaping material futures free from the everyday obstacles we presently face (Amoo-Adare, 2019; Ogunyankin, 2019; Da Silva, 2014). It is from my own situated position that I employ a Black feminist epistemological frame as a critical approach to come to learn about Black children’s geographies from the SOI team members and SOI students in the context of Nima, and attend to the ways that spatial experience is deeply informed and tied to coloniality/modernity, racialization, and gender, and particularly experienced by young girls and boys.

My Black feminist approach to this spatial project, which is situated in a department of urban studies and reaches across to geographic (particularly global Black feminist geographic) thought, reaches toward “a conceptual arena through which more humanly workable geographies can be and are imagined” (McKittrick, 2006, p. xxvii) in and for Nima. I interpret producing such “humanly workable geographies” as an epistemic demand and an intentional practice of “de-linking” from the imperial white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal episteme that dominates our thinking, feeling, and knowing the world (hooks, 2009; Mignolo, 2007). I also envision this as “conscious practical work” (Amoo-Adare, 2019, p. 1) to make space for existing, thinking, relating, and writing beyond provincialized western rational thinking and its implications for modern understandings of race (Sharpe, 2016; Pierre, 2013), childhood and youth, and space and place (Aruldoss & Nolas, 2019; Ohito, 2019; Twum-Danso Imoh, 2016). For me this is the radical and necessary work of thinking and doing otherwise, an otherwise that I embody by thinking and being in relation with Nima residents and SOI team members as Black subjects who theorize from their own lived experiences and accumulated and situated knowledges, rather than engaging them as Black objects of study.

This process of thinking in relation is grounded in a communal, relational ontology as a way of being, connecting to space, and knowing the world: We come to know our existence in the world, and to know the world, through our connections in community with others. This relational ontology, the foundation of many African understandings of oneself in the world (Chilisa, 2012; Wiredu, 2008), also shapes this epistemological approach of theorizing as a process of building knowledge with others, as co-creating space to think and do otherwise, and coming together to

shape understandings of children's spatial experiences in the Nima neighborhood of Accra with the commitment to "reclaiming our humanity" (Tamale, 2020, p. 20). I practice this through the front porch conversation. I recognize the knowledge of Nima residents and their local proverbs, and I build a process where we come together to reflect and think together as means of building knowledge together through conversation, a practice elemental to Black African indigenous relational approaches of building knowledge that emphasizes working in relation to each other and the larger community, collective decision-making, and sharing knowledge (Chilisa, 2012).

In particular, the SOI front porch conversation with Larry, Fatimatu, and Mustapha is a material, critical, and conceptual space where we produce particular lines of thinking, and I in turn connect to academic scholarship. Here I consider the SOI team members' voices and insights as "modes of theory" where we, in line with SOI's Pan-African ideology, embrace Black diasporic thinking across global Black subjectivities (Macharia, 2016, p. 185). This lends to thinking and reading scholarship relationally (between Africa and diasporic histories, relations, and resultant scholarship). It means working with African and African knowledges in relation, just as SOI works with Africans and African Diasporans to shape a learning space for Nima children and youth. For me, this is in order to "learn from the Afrocentric canon(s) and renew a kinship between African and Africana Studies" (Adomako Ampofo, 2019, p. 295). In a similar vein, conceptualizing the connected racialization of Black Africans and Black diasporans together is crucial for this research:

"The crucial practices of European empire making -- practices involving the key events of the transatlantic slave trade and racial colonialism -- and the resultant racialization of African peoples into 'Blacks' cannot only be assumed, but have to be actively and analytically articulated in our engagement with these populations...they are part of a larger historical arc that continues to shape identity and community on both sides of the Atlantic" (Pierre, 2013, p. 215)

In doing this, I am engaging a frame of global Black geographies that opens up opportunities for theorizing from African and Africa Diaspora (Black) scholarship, to produce a critical conceptual framework through which I will read the learnings from this collaborative research project. I am also making clear my choices in this

process, which is my experimentation in my Black feminist praxis that plays a critical role in the intellectual shaping of this thesis.

Nima observations and an SOI office porch conversation

In this section, I represent two statements (one from a community resident and political authority who participated in our research process, another from an SOI team member) and our porch conversation. My emphasis here is to demonstrate how I build this conceptual framework as one that is uniquely situated within larger community conversations, and in the subsequent section, the ways in which I read these community conversations and then put them in relation with academic scholarship.

The first statement, made by Honorable Shareau Tajudeen on a Saturday afternoon in June 2019, was at the community event that the SOI students, team members, and I organized to produce a temporary child-centered community space where we shared our research process and learnings.¹⁸ Honorable Tajudeen, the former assemblyman for Nima East and Ayawaso East Constituency and an interview participant in this research project, is also one of our invited guests. In the preceding chapter, Honorable Tajudeen speaks about planning and spatial politics in the neighborhood from his position as a long-time local city authority. With him and others, we had occupied a short stretch of Oku Street in front of the SOI office to emplace the SOI students and other children in community space and to exhibit a selection of materials the SOI students had produced: photographs, a group map, and their stories, which they read aloud to a large audience of friends, family, community authorities, vendors, and others passing by.¹⁹ In his role as event chairman, he listens to the SOI students' stories, then delivers a speech. Moving between Hausa and English, he reflects on the children's ideas, he encourages their efforts, and he makes his own connections to the issues and ideas that they vocalize. Within his four-and-a-half minute speech, he says:

“All what the kids read, we are seeing it. Smokers are disturbing our community, and bad behavior is generalized in Nima community. We put politics in our activities...We can see the drain and the

¹⁸ I discuss this community event as part of our collaboratively shaped arts-based research methodology in Chapter 4. As I discuss in that chapter, this community event becomes a means for not only sharing our research with the community in Nima neighborhood, but also a site-specific space of intervention, and, through this porch conversation, an important event that we reflect on to build conceptual meanings for this research project.

¹⁹ I draw on a selection of these stories in the empirical section of this thesis.

gutter not being covered, and cars knock down kids and the adults [in the street]. Ideally, pavements are meant for the pedestrian to walk over, but they have become business centers. What is happening? Are we not human beings? I went to Hamburg, I walked freely without fear. You can't find rubbish on the street or anywhere, so why can't we emulate them? Are we not the same flesh and bones as them?"²⁰

The second statement is one that SOI team member Mallam Mutawakil²¹ would make frequently during our research process: that "Ghanaians are magicians" and "Ghanaians survive by magic." One day when, sitting together in the SOI office with Mallam Mutawakil, I asked him to break down this idea for me, as an outsider and someone unfamiliar with this saying. From the office porch, Mallam Mutawakil points to a bricklayer, who on the other side of the Nima gutter, has taken an open space of the pavement, and is bent over mixing sand, cement, and water into thick blocks. Magic, Mallam Mutawakil explains, is in how Nima residents do like this, using everyday knowledge and resourcefulness to initiate their own makeshift solutions to their urban challenges. He says:

"[Magic is] to turn human might into something, to turn something impossible into something possible...a trick using the human mind that can include good things and bad things and in between. For example, human beings without work finding ways to survive. If we analyze, it can include lying, stealing, whatever that person thinks is ok to do to make things happen...in Ghana we need to survive. Leaders want us to be doing the impossible for survival in impossible circumstances. You'll see someone without work but dressing well and feeding their kids. Meanwhile, he's not a thief or an armed robber. It's magic."²²

A couple of weeks after our community event, and in preparation for a research presentation we are developing for the Ghana Studies Association at the University of Ghana, Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha and I sit on the outside front porch of the SOI office to talk about these statements. From the porch that day, we look out onto the deep and long uncompleted Nima gutter, unfinished due to a stalled government

²⁰ This is an excerpt of Honorable Tajudeen's speech as chairman at our June 22, 2019 community event. He delivers this speech in Hausa, and we record this speech and other activities at the event. Thank you Mustapha Adamu for interpreting Honorable Tajudeen's speech.

²¹ The title "Mallam," from Hausa language, is used for "a learned man or scribe."

²² Interview with Mallam Mutawakil, March 20, 2019.

infrastructure project, street vendors, passing cars, the bricklayer at work, as well as the stretch of Oku Street that we had occupied with our community event. The scene before us captures the references in both Honorable Tajudeen and Mallam Mutawakil's statements, as well as so much of the bodies, materials, objects, memories, and affects shared by the SOI students throughout the research process. Below, I represent three excerpts from this porch conversation, where we discuss our individual interpretations of these words and our understandings of the human, how power mediates the children's inhabitation of space, and magic. Through our discussion (a portion of which I represent here in format of long-form transcription), we generate together ways of conceptualizing children's experience of community space in Nima. In representing this conversation here, I illustrate a method of our theorizing together.

In the first part of the conversation, we discuss Honorable Tajudeen's statement, and in particular his questions "Am I not a human being?" "So why can't we emulate them?" and "Are we not the same flesh and bones as them?":

Victoria: I asked Mustapha if he could translate what [Honorable Shareau Tajudeen] said, because some of it was in Hausa, some of it was in English.

Mustapha: Mmhmm.

Victoria: He said, "Are we not human beings?" or something like that. It made me think about what does it mean to be human, but also considering the kind of environment the government creates, that exists here, is it fit for human beings? Does that make sense?

Larry: Yes, it makes sense.

Victoria: What does it mean to you? To me, it seems it's almost like a way of treating somebody, if you don't invest in the community. Everybody who lives in the community is a human being, right, but leaving this drain [uncompleted], it should be covered, right? Because the people who live here, we're all human beings, right?

Larry: Yeah, what he was trying to say is, he's talking to the level of marginalization. Anytime they need votes, they come to the community, then they know us. After we vote for them, anytime they want to bring any development project, they don't bring it in Nima. They focus on where the development is. So he was saying that, "Are we also not human beings to also enjoy this kind of development, or these kinds of privileges?" So that's the statement he was trying to put across.

Because we feel like Nima's been marginalized for so many years. Anytime you tell somebody you are from Nima, then they see you -- they see a kind of stereotype, they see you as a social misfit. You don't fit to be in society of elites. But he said that when he traveled to Germany, there's a lot of talent in Germany. Even there's a lot of talent in Nima, who are even more than the talent he saw in Germany. That's because there they have equal rights of humanity, they enjoy, but he doesn't see it in Nima here. So he was asking that, "Are we not also human beings to also enjoy the same things like the way Akufo-Addo [Ghana's current president] and John Mahama [Ghana's immediate past president] also enjoy? So, it's frustrating. Sometimes I also ask myself that kind of question.

Victoria: Mmhmm.

Larry: Because I've been to many places, I've done a lot of projects, I've seen that in Nima, we still don't fit in the society, we are like social misfits. We have a lot of graduates, but people don't see us as socially fit in the society. Even in terms of job applications, when they see that you're from Nima, then they begin to project onto you as ignorant, as violent, as misfit. If the manager begins to think this way, then automatically, you're going to lose that job. They're going to favor somebody from East Legon [affluent neighborhood in Accra] than someone from Nima, no matter how qualified you are. So sometimes too the community and the name also affect us...

Mustapha: (Turns to Fatimatu and speaks to Fatimatu in Hausa)

Victoria: (*Turns to Fatimatu*) Fatimatu, what do you think --

Mustapha: -- about what the assemblyman said? You heard him?

Fatimatu: (Moves her head from side to side to indicate no)

Mustapha: So basically, what the assemblyman was saying, he relates his presentation on the space. One of the things he said was that when he traveled to Germany, he was amazed. He was like "We're all the same human beings," but that takes me back to our conscience. If this space is meant for people to pass, and we have a place whereby we can dump any rubbish, why is it that those types of people, they are always in the righteous place, in a righteous way? But when you come here, it's a different thing. This space is meant for us to pass, but people have occupied the space doing their business. So he was like, "Are we not the same human beings?" It's just the color that differentiates between we and them. I think it's our conscience. We need to start

from the scratch, from the homes, and the churches, and the mosques and everywhere. So that we can address this problem, we can get the solution to it. If our conscience does not change, there is no way we can. We can do all sorts of research, write reports. There are so many reports at the district level, but they will never come and do it. The one who is responsible is sitting in his office enjoying all the luxury in the office, but they will never come into the grassroots and say to you, “Oh, why are you here?” and the person will say to you “It’s so, so, and so, there’s no space, so if you provided the space for us, we’ll move to that place” [refers to street vendors who inhabit space at the sidewalk pavements, the space that pedestrians would use to walk on.] But they [government officers] won’t do that, they’ll be in the office and taking the monies and they won’t come to the public or the grassroots to get to the main cause of the problem. So, it’s our conscience, everything that is happening is our conscience. *(Turns to Victoria)* I know that you, when you take water, when you’re in the United States, when you buy a bottle of water, after you finish drinking it, there’s no way you’ll throw it anywhere [litter on the ground].

Fatimatu: *(Laughs)*

Mustapha: No! You’ll put it in a bag. I was passing by, was it [names white female PhD researcher from the US also conducting research in Nima] or you [referring to Victoria], she finished pure water, she didn’t throw it [on the ground], she put it in her bag. So why? So it’s our conscience. I don’t know how the Blacks were nurtured.

Victoria: Oh, is it about...? See, that is interesting.

Larry: Mustapha, don’t say Blacks...Our problem of “are we not human beings?” for this person selling on the pavement, maybe that’s how you understand it.

Victoria: I want to hear Fati. Fati, you were saying something before?

Fatimatu: When you go from Berlin Bridge to this side, it’s a difference from this side *(waves her hand to indicate where are sitting, in Nima)* to that side *(with one hand, gestures toward neighboring Maamobi neighborhood)*. When it comes to neatness and them using the pavement...I can also say it’s when someone is disregarded. Cause someone can say “Am I not a human being?” in their local language or in English. For example, let’s say with blocking off the road [Fatimatu here refers to our struggles to block Oku Street from cars and motorbikes and claim the space for the youth community event], if I as a female am trying to do

that with the problems of the motorbikes, I will feel like am I not a human being...I'm trying to block the road. When the guys are there, it's normal for them, they can try to control them. But when it's me it will be very difficult, in that instance. They [motorbike riders] won't mind me. I will feel like, am I also not a human being? Because I'm being neglected.

In this second portion of the conversation, we turn our attention to our own situated understandings of the ways children's access to space is mediated through embodied politics of power. This is our attempt to negotiate the differential experiences of the human, and in particular, how difference is constituted through children's less-than-human experience within community space:

Victoria: What does this [Honorable Tajudeen's question on the human being] mean for kids, because as we know in African culture, right, when you are older, you now have respect. You now have some authority. So the kids talk about how they want to play at Chalilon Park, but they get sacked by the adults. They themselves have to navigate more than everybody else, they don't have money, or political authority that we as adults would have to claim the space.

Larry: Somebody like me as an adult, I can occupy this space; if people come, I can resist. I have the power to resist, and I have friends who can also support me to resist. But a kid doesn't have that kind of power to resist, so if a kid occupies a space, an adult like Mustapha or I can come and sack the kid over there. But if somebody like me or Mustapha or Fati, I can resist. [If Mustapha comes to occupy a space and is challenged by another adult] Mustapha would say "Why didn't you even think there is a space here? You're waiting for me to come and do and after doing, and now you're talking." Like this guy came and spent his money, he's estimated it, now he's using it, you're jealous. All of the community will rally behind Mustapha. because he was able to identify the place and make it good, and now that it's good, you want to be irate. So sometimes also, power and resistance also play a major role. If you have the power, you can resist.

Victoria: And this is like, when we were doing our community event that early Saturday morning, Larry was one of those who came very early. And I remember you were telling me that even when you wanted to set up, they didn't respect you.

Larry: Yes, they say I'm a stranger, I can't use this space. But if only Tikas or Mubarak [who live near the SOI office and Oku Street] was here, it's fine. They imagine that if it's in front of their house, they can occupy the space. So when I came here, they were confused, they were asking "Ah, how can I, a stranger, come and occupy this place at the street?" But where I was born [in another area of Nima], I can occupy a space there, I'm a citizen of that place.

Victoria: Remember Fati, there was time where, even in the intersection, the tents were set up, the banners were there, we were trying to block the road but there were still people trying to enter the whole time, walking through, on their motorbikes...

Fatimatu: Yes!

Mustapha: When they [adults] were passing, they only see kids, so they won't mind them. [They will ask:] 'What are you doing here?' But when it's their age mates or older, they know that when they are passing by, they know that they will be confronted and if you want to resist, something will happen to them - you will beat them. It's power.

Victoria: So it's power again?

Mustapha, Larry, Fatimatu: Yes.

Victoria: Does it also have a gender element? Because I felt like Fati and I had a difficult time preventing [the adult men on motorbikes from passing through our community event]. There was a time where they wouldn't mind us. But if they saw Larry or they saw Mustapha, they would pause a bit more.

Fatimatu: I wouldn't expect those outside to respect me because the person does not know me. Especially in the streets; when we are blocking streets, the men have more power because it's the men who normally block the street and at most times it's the men who are on the motorbikes. So when it's the guys [Mustapha and Larry], they can stop them, but when it's me, it will be very different.

Larry: Yes, they also know that we possess the same power. We also possess the same power. They know that if they touch me, I am a man of millions. If you touch me, the people will support me... In Nima, power respects power. If you realize that I also have the same power to retaliate, you will respect me. We also have women who normally block the street, and the guys cannot move them. You cannot touch them. If you beat them, they have brothers. They'll come and retaliate. So Nima

life is power, if you have power, you can do anything, if you don't have power, you have to be in the minority.

Fatimatu: Yeah.

Victoria: Like the kids?

Mustapha: Even there are certain kids who have power.

Victoria: Who are they, how do they get power?

Mustapha: Oh! Let's say like the age group of [16-year-old girls] or [15-year-old girls], they have power too. When they have numbers, when their numbers are there, they can also block the street. So it's vice versa [what the adults do, the kids can also do].

Larry: There was a day when [a 16-year-old girl and SOI student] was beaten here by some guys on the street.

Fatimatu: They slapped her, and they shoved her.

Larry: When she came back here, she came and told me that a certain boy beat her. So what I did, I followed her there. When I got there, they ran away. So I was able to seize their motorbike. I brought the motorbike here and the key. But they cannot come and confront me, so they brought another elderly person here. Because the boys are many, but they often can't do anything, no matter how many they are. Those boys came here, they started to talk, but I said, "If you come here, I'll show you." So, they came again with an elderly person. [The SOI student] also came and brought her mom and her uncle. The uncle and the mom came and beat the guys again. And now she is walking around freely.

Fatimatu: *(Laughs)*

Larry: Now, they can't touch her.

In this third excerpt of our porch conversation, we shift our focus to a discussion on Mallam Mutawakil's words on magic. Here, each of us articulates our understandings, building together ways of understanding this as everyday and essential spatial practice in Nima neighborhood, and implemented by a range of the neighborhood's inhabitants:

Victoria: So Mutawakil, he always mentions "Ghanaians are magicians, Ghanaians do magic."

Fatimatu: *(Laughs)*

Victoria: Which is interesting because, ok, do I have it here... *(looks for notes)*. There was a time I asked him, "Ok, what do you mean?" Because I thought it was just Mutawakil saying this, and then I was listening to the radio, CitiFM, and then somebody --

Fatimatu: Said it.

Victoria: Yes, they said it. And then, there was somewhere else I heard it, and then I realized I didn't understand that this is something people say. And so, I asked Mallam Mutawakil, "Ok, so when you say this, for you what does it mean?" And he talked about how it's about survival --

Larry: Yeah.

Victoria: That you are put into this environment where things are made to be difficult, and you have to find a way to survive, and it means using your brain, it means using things you can't see...you can't see the solution, you have to create the solution. So, I wanted to see what you guys think about that. Because it makes me think about the challenges and the opportunities for the kids in the public space.

Larry: Yeah.

Victoria: So, as we're talking about these people who come and use the public space. Those who built the cement blocks, the vendors, the hawkers, is that also included in the magic, even if it also causes issues for other people?

Larry: Yes. I will say yes because it's part of it. But there's also a lot behind it. Me, I see all of this as smartness. Living in places like Nima, Jamestown, it's about how the brain works. You need to have some entrepreneurial skills to survive. So, in Nima, everybody's an entrepreneur, by different way of doing his entrepreneurship. Some are born to sell on the street, it's only few who are born to work in offices. In Nima, we don't believe in working under anyone, everyone wants to be his own boss. That's where the magic comes from. I don't want to be under anyone's command, I want to have my own freedom. So, if you want to have your own freedom, you need to develop a natural entrepreneurship, how can you survive. You see? So, this contributes to the kind of magic Mutawakil is talking about. Mutawakil does a lot of work: he's a tiler, he never learned tiling. He's a mason, he never learned how to mason. He's a carpenter, he never learned that. He's a painter, he's a designer.

Fatimatu: He's everything.

Larry: It's also part of the smartness, you need to be continuously learning to survive. That's how Nima life is. He can also barber, he never learned barbering from anyone. Anytime there's Sallah [festival for Eid al-Fitr], people are cutting their hair. So that time, you need to use your smartness to make money.

Victoria: Yeah...to find opportunities.

Larry: So, we are always in constant learning, in constant search of opportunities to survive. So, this is how Nima was programmed. I don't know about other communities, but Nima in general, this is how it's programmed.

Victoria Mmhmm, wow. (*Turns to Fatimatu*). Fati, do you agree? Mustapha do you agree?

Mustapha: Yes, a hundred percent.

Fatimatu: (*Begins by speaking in Hausa to Larry and Mustapha, and then turns to me and to English*). Every evening, there's a guy who starts a car wash here. I don't know where he stays, but when cars are parked like this, maybe by three or four [in the afternoon], you see him washing the cars.

Larry: So, they introduced car washing here. So, the space... People park their cars here. He realized that the cars are dirty. So, they need to wash their cars. So, he will come and wash your car, and then you pay him. Nobody asked him to do it. He sat down, he created his own job, and now he's doing that for him.

Victoria: So, does that mean...the public space becomes the space where everybody is trying to use to create their own opportunities? Everybody is trying to survive, what opportunity can I find, how can I use the space...

Larry, Fatimatu: Yes.

Fatimatu: It's almost everything. The female entrepreneurs, most of them, you see them selling on the pavements, sometimes in the lungus, so they use that as a means of putting entrepreneurship skills on. It's girls setting up their bases [children and youth hangout spots for leisure in community space]. It's magic because normally these girls don't seem to have bases, so them setting up bases is like a new thing. Anybody can be a magician.

Conceptualizing the human, starting from Nima

The preceding section re-presents Honorable Tajudeen and Mallam Mutawakil's statements alongside our (Larry, Mustapha, Fatimatu and my) porch conversation exploring two concepts for framing children's spatial experience in Nima: the human and magic. In this section, I think together Honorable Tajudeen and Mallam Mutawakil's offerings, Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha, and my reflective porch conversation, and I put these in connection with academic scholarship. I discuss each of these interrelated concepts in turn and I do the conceptual work to explore how these concepts operate, how they are used in existing scholarship and local knowledge systems, and how they relate with each other. In doing this, I construct and illustrate my own original conceptual framework, which weaves together these disparate notions, theories, and forms of knowledge.

“Are we not human beings?”

The human emerges as a critical concept from our conversation, and we consider multiple, interconnected scales: the body/embodied, interpersonal, the urban/city, and the global. Fatimatu traces the rhetorical question to an intimate lack of care in everyday interpersonal mistreatments, neglect, and disregard, including between Nima residents and by Nima residents toward their own environment. This is also a rhetorical questioning that I have seen echoed in other contexts.²³ As she states, “I will feel like, am I also not a human being? Because I'm being neglected.” She highlights how one is made to feel like a human being (or not), providing insight into this as felt experience made both in and on the corporeal body, as emotional and sensorial, as affective. Fatimatu mentions that this is a phrase that residents carry over from their local Ghanaian languages into English. She makes the connection to local indigenous cosmological worldviews in Ghana which regard “the human being as sacred and worthy of dignified treatment” (Atiemo, 2013, p. 30). In these conceptions, every human being is endowed with a soul, the divine essence that is a vital life force of the individual and community and upheld through positive behavior toward oneself and others. Mistreatment and degrading behavior - for example, hitting someone with sandal (from the feet, the lowest part of the human

²³ I come across other instances in Accra where individuals have asserted this question to highlight their mistreatment by others. Some months after our event, sitting in a cafe in another part of Accra, I overhear a waitress employ this question as she angrily recounts to her colleague being verbally mistreated by a customer: “Am I not a human being?” she says. In a text on the experiences of disable persons in Ghana, a disabled man described how he would employ this question when fellow passengers entering public transport would shift away from him so as to avoid physical contact: “Am I not a human being like you?” he would ask (Guerts & Komabu-Pomeyie, 2016, p. 90).

body) or with a broom (used for sweeping garbage and refuse, and so equating that person to garbage), or worse, acts such as assault, rape, or murder, are among taboo behaviors and violences which devastate the life force of both individual and community. These behaviors undermine the dignity of the individual's being: For example in such contexts of mistreatment, "the Mfantse would say, *onnye nyimpa* (he/she is not human)" (Atiemo, 2013, p. 133). For the victim, who suffers humiliation, trauma and violated dignity, rituals are performed to re-integrate their soul, body and spirit as an individual and full human being with the community (Atiemo, 2013). These local conceptions and Fatimatu's offering demonstrate the corporeal bodies, actions, and vital life forces as mediums through which human beingness continually emerges. Fatimatu's rendering of this question provides means of reading the human as entangled with the relational, interpersonal, felt, even affective elements of space, such as in place-based scholarship with Black children in the Canadian context that attends to their "ongoing material, embodied and discursive dehumanization enacted through anti-Blackness and settler colonialism" (Nxumalo, 2020a, p. 36).

Honorable Tajudeen's further question ("Are we not the same flesh and blood as them?") and Mustapha's reflections ("It's just the color that differentiates between we and them. I think it's our conscience," and "I don't know how the Blacks were nurtured") attend to how the human intertwines corporeal and structural sensibilities. These deeply existential statements, which are reflections from situated experiences in the built environment of Nima neighborhood, demonstrate their conception of themselves as Nima residents whose Blackness is racialized within the context of their post-independent, majority Black African country and in the world. Their questioning demonstrates that conceptualizing the human from Nima requires an interrogation with the global construction of Blackness, with attention to the local and global histories in the ways that Blackness has been narratively rendered subhuman, and to situate Nima in the production of this difference. This points to the ways in which western modernity, constituted through racial slavery and colonialisms, fundamentally structure - or nurture, to think with Mustapha - a world in which Black peoples' existence as human beings is constantly put into question (Sithole, 2019; Walcott, 2014; Wynter, 2003) including for individuals and spaces in the context of Ghana and Accra specifically (Bowles, 2021; Holsey, 2008).

Sylvia Wynter (2003), in a sweeping, transdisciplinary essay, argues that the central struggle of our time is "unsettling the coloniality of [our] being/power/truth/freedom," which she locates in the overrepresentation of the

white western bourgeois heterosexual man as the “descriptive statement” of the human. This is the violent epistemic and political project of modernity enduring since the past five centuries, and which has relegated the rest of our human species (including we who are not white western bourgeois heterosexual man and are racialized, classed, gendered, etc. as Other) into the lower categorizations of not-quite human and subhuman, and with African and African diaspora peoples located at the nadir of this hierarchy of being (Wynter, 2003). This project produces and rationalizes the “narratively condemned status” of Black peoples and our subjugation and oppression through slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and segregation (Weheliye, 2014; Du Bois, 2007). This nurturing unfolds over multiple, overlapping phases of knowledge discourse, scientific intervention, and colonizing encounters to position Black (and other) peoples as subhuman.²⁴ These consecutively and cumulatively situate Black peoples (African and Diasporan) at the lowest rung of the human ladder and then rationalized this lowest position as a naturally determined evolutionary trait:

“In the wake of the West’s second wave of imperial expansion, *pari passu* [side by side] with its reinvention of Man now purely biologized terms, it was to be the peoples of Black African descent who would be constructed as the ultimate referent of the “racially inferior” Human Other, with the range of other colonized dark-skinned peoples, all classified as “natives,” now being assimilated to its category—all of these as the ostensible embodiment of the non-evolved backward Others—if to varying degrees and, as such, the negation of the generic “normal humanness,” ostensibly expressed by and embodied in the peoples of the West. Nevertheless, if the range of Native Others were now to be classified...the most salient of all these was to be that of the mythology of the Black Other of sub-Saharan Africans (and their Diaspora descendants). It is this population group who would come to be made, several centuries on, into an indispensable function of

²⁴ One of the earliest iterations was through Judeo-Christian Europe, which centered its religion and adherents as the descriptive statement of human, and rendered nonbelievers as not-quite or subhuman. The subsequent hybridization into a religio-secular understanding narrativized the human as the “rational self and political subject of the state” (p. 281). In the 19th century, imperial expansion, the emergence of the biological sciences and liberal humanism produced a descriptive statement of the human to be “optimally economic Man, at the same time as this Man was redefined by Darwin as a purely biological being whose origin, like that of all other species, was sited in Evolution” (Wynter 2003, p. 314).

the enacting of our present Darwinian ‘dysselected by Evolution until proven otherwise’ descriptive statement of the human on the biocentric model of a natural organism. With this population group’s systemic stigmatization, social inferiorization, and dynamically produced material deprivation thereby serving both to ‘verify’ the overrepresentation of Man as if it were the human, and to legitimate the subordination of the world and well-being of the latter to those of the former” (Wynter 2003, p. 266-267)

Wynter demonstrates the global production of racialized Blackness, which includes “the Black Other of sub-Saharan Africans (and their Diaspora descendants),” as subhuman. In the essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” Hortense Spillers (1987) also takes up this question of the human, forming a critical distinction between the body of the fully human individual as liberated and rational political subject and the flesh of the captive, enslaved, less-than-human Black being produced from racial slavery. Spillers (1987) argues that the making of the New World (and with it, the constitution of western modernity itself) was/is a “scene of actual mutilation, dismemberment, and exile” of the Black body, which we can only register through the primary narrative of the flesh:

“But I would make a distinction in this case between “body” and “flesh” and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the “body” there is the “flesh,” that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography. Even though the European hegemonies stole bodies--some of them female--out of West African communities in concert with the African “middleman,” we regard this human and social irreparability as high crimes against the *flesh*, as the person of African females and African males registered the wounding. If we think of the “flesh” as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship’s hole, fallen, or “escaped” overboard...[as] tortures and instruments of captivity...These undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctions come to be hidden in the cultural seeing of skin color” (Spillers, 1987, p. 67, emphasis in original)

Spillers’ work demonstrates the importance of the body, embodiment, and the corporeal to our building understandings of the human, and a meaningful point for

theorizing from the site of the body to larger social structures and historical experiences. She demonstrates the flesh as the corporeal site that registers the physical woundings of slavery, and as the medium which, through skin color, continues to register this wounding for Black subjects in the diaspora in the afterlife of slavery (Hartman, 2007). This narrative of the flesh demonstrates the thingification of the African body as experiential process of dehumanization, which began with the brutal process of slavery and its commodification of the human being: Stolen, forced along slave routes, caged in barracoons and dungeons, packed into the belly of a ship or caravans, sold, branded and mutilated, and labored as impersonalized property.²⁵ The flesh, blood, and bones of these African were rejected; in the case of trans-Atlantic slavery, these humans were made into a “total objectification” that was/is Other to the liberated, rational, white body-subject of western culture (Sithole, 2019, p. 68). These practices of slavery were local, regional, and global modes of “dehumanization *par excellence*” (Sithole 2019, p. 30, emphasis in original). And yet, while global and relational in their reading, it is necessary to note that both Wynter and Spillers produced their works from their geographical locations in the United States and in general, centering the US (and for Wynter, Caribbean) experience, and Tendayi Sithole in the South African context. To engage these questions with the context of Ghana, and in Nima in particular, requires a closer consideration of the realities of slavery and colonialism and their present legacies.

So, I return to our porch conversation, to the moment when Larry expresses the sentiment that “we feel like Nima’s been marginalized for so many years” to interrogate how to situate Nima within this discourse of human. I notice how the structural patterns, histories, and marginalizations felt locally also map onto the global mappings that Wynter and Spillers frame in their works. Larry speaks to a long, structural pattern which produces Nima as a chronically under-resourced neighborhood, one where residents lack “equal rights of humanity” on par with residents in more-resourced neighborhoods. Larry contrasts Nima with East Legon and Cantonments, two affluent, resourced neighborhoods in Accra (the immediate former president resides in the latter), and he brings into our frame the urban inequalities that exist between Accra neighborhoods. In addition, his comments also demand a temporal perspective: Larry speaks to how the human (and

²⁵ Both Wynter and Spillers in these works on the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Here I take together the multiple networks of slavery in which peoples were captured and transported in present-day Ghana: The local slave trade (domestic within present-day Ghana), the regional slave trade (operating within the West African region), the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the trans-Saharan slave trade.

dehumanization) is historically and presently produced, through structural inequalities and neglect. Further, both Mustapha and Larry link this question of the human to the myriad and contemporary forms of marginalization enacted by city authorities and elected local leaders on Nima neighborhood in particular. They position this within a spatialized pattern of government disengagement from their neighborhood and resident constituents, where authorities render abstract the material realities of the neighborhood through distanced presences in government offices and high-level reports. Elected leaders too, Larry describes, reproduce patterns of unequal investment in the city's neighborhoods, allocating resources to already resourced neighborhoods and perpetuating disinvestment in under-resourced neighborhoods. Then, in addition to these material inequalities, Larry highlights the popular narratives which define Nima and its residents - a neighborhood founded by Muslim migrants and today home to a large population of Muslims, many of whom are Northerners (from Ghana's northern regions), and immigrants from the West African region - as "violent" and "social misfits," which dehumanizes by positioning them as out-of-place with a modern, cosmopolitan Accra and its "society of elites." Larry's statements reflect the reality that in contemporary Ghanaian media, popular discourse, and interpersonal encounters, there is a deep and persistent stigmatization against Northerners and Muslims, where they are typified as "backwards," "unsophisticated," "primitive," "aggressive," and "violent" in patterned stereotypes shaped through the histories of slavery and colonialism that persist to present (Bowles, 2021; Holsey, 2008; Prah, 1975).

A full and thorough discussion of the legacies of slavery and colonialism in Ghana and how they continue to shape regional and ethnic categories, stigmas, and inequalities is beyond the scope of this thesis. Yet it is important to note that the modernity project constituted through racial slavery and colonialism also produced a hierarchy of Black human life in the Gold Coast colony/post-independent Ghana. This hierarchy is structured through the history of social and economic exploitation and deprivation of Northerners (Prah, 1975) linked to and grounded in an "anti-Northern racism" and the persistent stigmatization of Northerners (Bowles, 2021, p. 4; Holsey, 2008). In Accra, Ghana's capital located in the southern part of the country, this anti-Northern racism and stigma positions Northerners and the communities and neighborhoods they inhabit in stark contrast to the city's modern, cosmopolitan ideals (Bowles, 2021).

The Othering of Northerners originates in the regional slave trades, which predate and overlap with the trans-Atlantic and trans-Saharan slave trade projects.

Historically, the centralized kingdoms, empires, and federations (located in present-day southern Ghana) Othered Northern territories for their decentralized social organization, militarily subjugated them, and extracted hundreds of enslaved persons from these territories as tribute annually (Holsey, 2008; Saaka, 1987). During the trans-Atlantic and trans-Saharan slave trades, these centralized kingdoms, including the Ashanti empire (located in southern Ghana) collaborated with European slave traders to position the Northern territories “as a pool of potential slaves” (Holsey 2008, p. 96). For example, both prevented Northern territories’ access to guns and ammunitions for their self-defense, facilitating successful slave raids of the Northern territories for centuries (Brukum, 2003). As a result, the “trans-Saharan, transatlantic, and African [slave] trade all fed upon the Northern territories of Ghana” leading to massive depopulation of these areas (Hartman 2007, p. 181). In their millions, captured Africans were marched along slave routes from the Northern territories to the coastal south, where they were shipped to the Americas and Caribbean. Today, it is the Northern territories and their inhabitants, as those principally targeted for enslavement, who bear the deep and lasting stigmas and negative local connotations of Ghana’s slave trade histories:

“In Ghana, those associated with the history of slave trading or enslavement are heavily stigmatized...The trade created a *hierarchy of black people* based on vulnerability to enslavement that continues to be reflected in contemporary hierarchies of global access. Projecting a *modern black identity* requires Ghanaians, in many instances, to purposefully distance themselves from the history of slavery.” (Holsey, 2013, p. 510, my emphasis)

Historically, it is Northerners who have been most vulnerable, both in reality and in discourse, to the brutalities of the slave traders and the slave trade project. In general, in Ghana it is Southerners, who historically used treaties, cooperation, and complicity to evade enslavement, in turn project onto Northerners a “lack of sophistication [as] those whom they enslaved” through connotations that they were and remain “bush,” “savage,” and “unsophisticated” peoples (Holsey 2008, p. 82). These perceptions of Northerners are also perpetuated throughout Ghana, including in Accra. For example, the derogatory Fante term “ɔɔnko,” meaning “bought person,” has become synonymous with those of Northern heritage, based on their “perceived inferiority...and their past vulnerability to enslavement” (Holsey, 2008, p. 97).

These stigmas and vulnerabilities from slavery shape the hierarchy of Blackness within Ghana and were also compounded by British colonial practices and rhetoric around modernization. In the Southern regions, the British colonial administration invested in roads, schools, industry, and agriculture as development and modernization programs, part of enabling the growth of these regions, including Accra, into a major financial and industrial zone through globalized trade. In contrast, throughout the colonial period, the British colonial administration instituted a nondevelopment policy in Northern regions. This forced Northerners to migrate southward to coastal areas in search of employment opportunities, continuing the patterns of north-to-south movement first instituted in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, where Northern territories provided a pool of forced laborers to the coast, but this time as economic migrants (Holsey, 2008; Songsore et al., 2001). Northern regions and their inhabitants were again positioned as human labor reserves, this time for Ghana's export-oriented timber, mining, and agriculture industries (Wiemers, 2015).

This was directly related to the fact that the British colonial administration considered Southerners more civilized than Northerners:

“It seemed the whites treated Southerners better and obviously thought Southerners more ‘civilized.’ They were paid better, housed better, and unlike their Northern counterparts, could drink whiskey in the presence of whites. From the beginning, all white-collar and semiskilled jobs within the [colonial] protectorate were monopolized by Southerners. The menial jobs were reserved for the Northerners. Thus in terms of prestige the Southerners came next to the whites in the early days of British rule” (Saaka, 1987, p. 6)

That until today Northerners remain conspicuously (and disproportionately) visible in occupying menial forms of employment, for example, head porters, street vendors, and transport operators, both in Nima and more widely in Accra furthers the perception of their inferiority (Bowles, 2021; Holsey, 2008, 2013; Prah, 1975; Hart, 1970).

Further, colonial administrative planning produced spatial hierarchies positioning westernized design, aesthetics, and culture over the local. The colonial histories of the European town versus the native town, within the colonial city (like Accra), and their corollary investments and lack of investments produced stark spatial inequalities that persist and define Accra's neighborhoods (Pierre, 2020b; Ochonu, 2019; Grant & Yankson, 2003). Colonial architecture and planning produced a (white

and westernized) European sense of place in colonial Accra's European settler neighborhoods such as Cantonments and Ridge, versus the Black sense of place that existed for the African colonial subject, in the native areas and "zongos," like Nima. For example, Cantonments, the upscale neighborhood that Larry contrasts with Nima, was first designed as a colonial residential neighborhood for European officers, with bungalows, green spaces, and services, and today is one of the most affluent neighborhoods, home to foreign expatriate residents and international agency offices. This is in contrast with Nima, which has been deeply neglected since it was first founded by West African Muslim migrants in the early 1930s: first due to its geographical situatedness outside of colonial Accra (as an independent village sited beyond the colonial city boundaries), and still narratively framed as a "zongo" in both popular and institutional state discourse (Ministry of Inner-city & Zongo Development, 2021). The persistent framing of Nima as "zongo" is part of a consistent and particular practice of conceptualizing Nima, a 90-year-old neighborhood, as out-of-place spatially and temporally with Accra's urban trajectory narrative as a modern, settled city. Thus, the hierarchy of Black people within Ghana, measured by the standard of a "modern Black identity" (which, in its striving toward modernity, clings to the white westernized bourgeois overrepresentation of the human and its corollary forms of inhabitation) is particularly relevant in the stigmatization of the Northern regions in Ghana, its inhabitants, and Northern migrants in Accra.

When Honorable Tajudeen asks the question "so why can't we [in Nima] emulate them [in Hamburg]?" I recall his long-term position as political authority in the city and expressed investment in the city's development plans. Doing so, I read within this question the stated comparison between local conditions in Nima with Hamburg and further, a longstanding linear progressive narrative that positions westernized designs as "developed" over indigenous spatiality that are positioned as "undeveloped" in a spatial hierarchy (Moshood, 2019). In this case, this is a global hierarchy wherein post-independent Accra (and specifically Nima neighborhood) is situated below/behind the post-imperial European city of Hamburg. This framework also connects to the deep othering and racialization of space more locally in Accra (Bowles, 2021; Fevrier, 2020). While Tajudeen's questioning witnesses the difference in the quality of life that he has experienced in these two locales, I also maintain careful attention to the danger of the linear progressive narrative embedded in his statement, with its origins in the "civilizing mission" of colonialism (Njoh, 2007) and the linked aspiration that Nima move from its current conditions and spatial practices to emulate Hamburg in a development trajectory that is oriented toward a singular westernized modernity (Ndlovu-

Gatsheni, 2015). Both of these are deeply entangled with the production of the racialized Black subject as object (Sithole, 2019; Walcott, 2014; Wynter, 2003). Invoking the colonial attitude of the necessary transition from “traditional” to westernized is part of a linear modernization narrative long employed to mark the African urban spaces as in need of development (Moshood, 2019; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Fry & Drew, 1964). This question of emulating the west and westernized modernity is also part of the colonial-colonized mindset that elevates western cultural attributes over indigenous ones, and has historically been targeted toward those embodying indigenous values, aesthetics, and dress as backwards (Holsey, 2008).

Finally, with regards to our discussion of the human, Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha and my discussion of power within our porch conversation demonstrates the interpersonal negotiation of space as a medium of spatial experience from which children’s status as less-than-human also emerges. This conversation demonstrates that in the context of Nima, children’s ability to access, claim, and inhabit in community spaces are not only shaped by structural dynamics (the historical experiences, contemporary and popular discourses and stereotypes, economics, politics, and material conditions that shape a less-than-human environment), but also interpersonal, embodied dynamics, movements, and encounters in place. This conversation generates an orientation to ways that children and adolescents in their different bodies – gendered, aged, able or disabled, and in their activities, whether alone or in groups – are differentially able to negotiate access to space and to defend against counterclaims to space.

This discussion of power speaks directly to Fatimatu’s interpersonal reading of the human. Fatimatu’s rendering speaks to how interpersonal mistreatment, neglect, and lack of care are experienced as a questioning of one’s humanity. This approach lends critical attention to the ways in which children are situated within a local hierarchy of the human that is articulated in Nima neighborhood and between residents in community space. From moment to moment, children’s ability to claim community space for their own uses is disciplined through a number of factors, including one’s age (such as the potential of children, versus young people, versus adults to inhabit space), gender (boys, young men, and older men with strength being more physically able than girls, young women, and older women to themselves claim and if needed, defend their space), proximity to boys and men (who can provide protection for girls, young women, and older women), their strength in numbers (which increases their potential to claim spaces as their own), and their recognition as community members (as recognized area residents with

entitlements to space, unlike perceived strangers). This framing illuminates additional categories of difference, particularly relevant to children's subjectivities, through which their access to community space is mediated, to consider how children are made less-than-human, as well as made out-of-place in community space. As well, this framing can also attend to the ways children negotiate this "embodied and relational" difference within their practices in everyday space (Konstantoni and Emejulu 2017).

"Ghanaians survive by magic"

Within the context of dehumanizing structures, forces, felt, and interpersonal experiences and treatments, Mallam Mutawakil's concept of magic points to ways of imagining and acting otherwise, of inventing space for opportunity within tight, challenging situations. For example, Mallam Mutawakil and Larry describe myriad ways in which residents employ and make use of the community space of streets, sidewalk pavements, lungus, and other spaces as necessary commercial sites to support their livelihoods and social activities, and Fatimatu extends this concept to practices of leisure and recreation. As Mallam Mutawakil articulates, to do magic is inherently human: It requires human mental creativity and embodied action in order to make things happen, not necessarily to physically change one's environment, but to bring about a change of one's experience within that environment. I read Mallam Mutawakil as illuminating a humanizing practice through which residents make space for themselves to breathe, more fully live, to anticipate and bring into life the potential for black livingness.

Mutawakil asserts that magic is "to turn something impossible into something possible" since "leaders want us to be doing the impossible for survival in impossible circumstances." His words highlight magic as a spatial practice of moving within and also beyond the limits of enclosure -- the systems and technologies of confinement and dispossession within neoliberal frameworks of settlement and ownership, which discipline the body, movement, imagination, relation, and potential to inhabit space, through means such as physical barriers and surveillance (Krishnan, 2019a; Hartman, 2016). Here, Mallam Mutawakil is not referring to spatial acts of resistance, nor ways of challenging the state, but rather creative operations within, despite, around, and beyond the space of enclosure:

"Not the master's tools, but the ex-slave's fugitive gestures...the paradox of cramped creation, the entanglement of escape and confinement, flight and captivity...It is the practice of the social otherwise, the insurgent ground that enables new possibilities and new vocabularies..." (Hartman 2019, p. 227-228).

I take magic as one of myriad, local and global operations in which Black people work “within, across, and outside commonsense cartographic and topographical texts” that continually seek to mark them as out-of-place, as placeless (McKittrick, 2011, p. 949), and, in the words of Larry, frame their residents as “social misfits” and their neighborhood as spatial “misfits.” As Larry explains, this magic emerges from individuals’ desire and action to not be “under” anyone else. He asserts that “we [Nima residents] are always in constant learning, in constant search of opportunities to survive...this is how Nima was programmed,” demonstrating magic as an adaptive improvisation and a common practice among residents. Larry describes this making of magic as a continued, ongoing practice within an ever-shifting terrain of dehumanizing structural forces and conditions, interpersonal power dynamics, rendering this doing of magic as a dynamic attention to continually scanning and learning one’s environment, and applying one’s knowledge toward making use of what one can in one’s environment (Simone, 2012).

Fatimatu asserts that “anybody can be a magician.” If any *body* can be a magician, then magic is embodied, situated, also performed: a Black space-making practice. Fatimatu employs the example of girls gathering together, which demonstrates this: “It’s girls setting up their bases,” she says, referring to their hangout spots in community space. Operating other to the westernized modes of space, it is the bricklayer and the street vendor who retool space for their commercial enterprises and the young girl reconfiguring a shopfront into a base where she and her friends gather and hang out, a space of assembly and sociality. Rather than acts of resistance -- in fact, as Larry attests, in most instances, children do not have resistance at their disposal -- I use this concept to read spatial practices children could employ as “forms of being together unimagined and unimaginable within white supremacist frames” (Macharia, 2016, p. 185), and to read their possibilities of producing new geographies outside of the dominant conception and control of state authorities and their renderings of modern space (Matsipa, 2017).

Here, I distinguish this concept of magic from the emerging scholarship on African youth and their “hustling” in cities. In Larry, Mustapha, and Fati’s examples, they certainly include residents’ self-organized entrepreneurial activities within their understandings of magic – to include Mallam Mutawakil’s tiling and barbering side business activities, Mallam Mutawakil himself points to the work of a bricklayer, and Fati also points to a makeshift parking attendant. Scholars have also used this notion of “hustling” to explore youths’ economic survival strategies, negotiations,

and navigations to make livelihood in contexts of economic uncertainty, irregular, and protracted unemployment (Amankwaa, Esson, & Gough, 2020; Thieme, 2013). For example, Thieme (2018) uses hustling as “a way to capture the everyday incremental livelihood strategies that inform youth identities and expressions of resistance” in economically under-resourced geographies of Nairobi (Thieme, 2018, p. 548). Instead, I work more expansively, beyond solely income-generating spatial practices, to think with magic as a method of waywardness that unsettles the dominant, inherited westernized imaginary of urban “public space,” particularly through play, leisure, and sociality. While Blackness has been produced and shaped by racialized oppression, it also encompasses methods of operations otherwise, learned from the everyday creative, unruly, and troublesome practices of racialized Black people, who make their way in an overwhelmingly antiblack world where they were never meant to flourish (Quashie, 2021; Sharpe, 2020; Hartman, 2019). While racial and other structural violences do shape place and spatial experience, they never fully settle this and other “Black worlds” - they “calcify, but do not guarantee, the denigration of Black geographies and their inhabitants” (McKittrick, 2011, pp. 947, 950). Drawing on the long and diverse histories of Black inhabitation in cities, Blackness as method comprises

“a turbulent unsettling that cannot be enclosed or colonized” and a “learn[edness] to live with incessant transience, quickly deciding how to recoup opportunity from sudden detours and foreclosures...to mine the city for beats and polyphony that reverberate across generations and nations, so as to attune bodies to each other” (Simone, 2016, p. 216)

We have something to learn from Nima residents’ everyday spatial practices of magic in this world made “impossible.” In thinking through these spatial practices, as well as the wider spatial realities of this thesis, I am mindful of Black feminist geographers’ contributions which demonstrate that Black lives, practices, and knowing are always geographic (Daley, 2020; Noxolo, 2020; Okafor, 2018; McKittrick, 2006). So, for this research project, I draw on the idea of the uninhabitable (as well as notions of inhabiting) to consider how Nima as a place that is inhabited and also produced through residents’ practices of inhabiting space, in this case, through spatial practices of magic. I work through this using Mallam Mutawakil’s offerings and with scholarship, mostly in geography (Lancione, 2019, 2020; Krishnan, 2019b; McKittrick, 2013; Wynter, 2003). I do this to acknowledge the “obvious conditions of violence, oppression, and toxicity” that exist within this neighborhood, and to, quite importantly, explore epistemic and material openings

and possibilities for “something else at work” (Simone, 2019, p. 10), such as the “social potentials” (Krishnan, 2019a, p. 4) that could emerge from children’s practices in community space.

The concept of the uninhabitable brings together the discourse of the human with the spatial and lived realities of place. Wynter (2003) traces this concept to the Europeans’ imperial perception of African territories in the 15th and 16th centuries as “too hot” to be livable and therefore outside of Christendom’s divine grace, then tied to the European conception of the human. These African regions were framed as “lands of no one,” (McKittrick, 2013, p. 6), that is, lands where no one was fully human. African peoples were “irrational” and “barbarous” and their lands “unsophisticated” and “undeveloped” and therefore suitable for transformation. The captured people were transformed into enslaved, commodified laborers and the colonized, and the captured territories transformed into colonial outposts and settlements, all of which were rendered toward European profit (McKittrick, 2013, p. 6). Therefore these colonial logics and systems mutually constitute place and identity: They produce fully humans who “naturally inhabit the livable, wealthy, overdeveloped” locales (upscale neighborhoods, countries, the “global North”) alongside the less-than-human/subhuman others who “naturally occupy dead and dying regions... [and] are made to function as ‘waste products’ in our contemporary global world” (the native town, the financially and infrastructurally under-resourced ghetto and slum, the native reservation, the country or region ravaged by war, the “global South”) (McKittrick, 2013, p. 7).

In Nima, local and national policies, which categorize the neighborhood as slum, operate in tandem with patterns of government disinvestment and neglect, reifying this status as chronically under-resourced and materially deprived. Nima’s intimate politics of infrastructure and material deprivation is an example of the slow, everyday, violence meted out upon individuals as corporeal experience (Datta, 2020), one that disproportionately burdens already under-resourced and stigmatized communities (Vasudevan, 2019). Further, we come to understand the human-in-habitable space and the less-than-human/subhuman-in-uninhabitable space in opposition to each other, with the expectation that we must strive to create the human-in-habitable space. Here I recall Honorable Tajudeen’s expressed desire that Nima might emulate Hamburg, echoing the dominant discourses and foreclosing all but a civilizing, unilinear development trajectory as means of Nima’s forward evolution.

McKittrick's (2013) theorizes the uninhabitable as a relation between the built (material) environment, the urban, and Black experience with the past and present through geographic location. In theorizing uninhabitability within the context of the slave plantations of antebellum United States, McKittrick reflects on the power of plots, drawing on Sylvia Wynter's text "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation) (Wynter, 1971): the written "plot" of the narrative novel, whose emergence is contextualized within the slavery plantation, and the physical "plots" within the plantation, small patches of land where enslaved individuals nurtured and grew their own food to nourish themselves. Both plots are creative spaces of improvisation for the production of narrative and storytelling, nourishing food, and space-based cultural practices that bear witness to antiblack systemic violence while also taking root in Black spatial logics and values of operations otherwise (McKittrick, 2013, p. 10), demonstrating a multi-layered approach for thinking about space - both the space of the written page, and the space of the urban environment - that is richly valuable for this thesis.

Theorizing of the uninhabitable offers another method of spatial practice, part of a Black epistemology that rethinks contemporary urbanism (Simone, 2021). Simone's approach is deliberately unsettling: Recognizing, as McKittrick does, the colonial spatiality of place that inform unequal living environments and render uninhabitable living spaces for those designated less-than-human, Simone operates from an entirely different reading of the built environment. He works with the "built" not as the material elements of brick, cement, corrugated iron, wooden slabs, and ground (an approach that would reify the uninhabitable as characterized by insufficient quantities or qualities of this or that), but rather the environment as a constantly evolving platform, shaped through residents' own everyday rhythms of operations, cycling through and with each other, as they scan their landscape for opportunities (Simone, 2019).

Focusing on creative spaces of improvisation bears witness to antiblack systemic violence while also taking root in Black spatial logics and values of operations otherwise (McKittrick, 2013, p. 10). These otherwise practices turn our attention toward unmaking and unsettling (rather than continually evidencing) colonial systems and their spatiality of death, destruction, and violation (McKittrick, 2013, p. 12, drawing on Wynter, 1971). Because this situation of inhabitability is also a sort of platform, always open to the different interventions by its local actors, this enables "something made up as it goes along," an opacity that provides cover to hold "impossible societies that nevertheless assume an inscription, materialize lines

of flight, attack, and articulating, ‘grooving’ the terrain (Simone, 2019, p. 14). These rhythms, operations, practices, and movements build the built environment:

We come to see the district, community, the neighborhood as a field of operations where individual entities, spiralling around each other and their locations of operation, come together through moving around and with each other, tentatively and momentarily, in ways of destabilizing and articulating, enfolding each other and detaching from each other in “complex collaborations” that sustain these individuals (Simone, 2019, p. 15-16).

These operations of magic are embodied spatial practices (by those narrated as subhuman, by those at the margins, by those who exist in uninhabitable environments, by those whose every operation of living is itself a practice of possibility within the realm of impossibility) and the performance of alternative forms of humanity and spatial relations. Mallam Mutawakil and these scholars show me that this world made impossible (and which had depended upon the subhumanity of some) is not a world to be adjusted to, but rather a world that must be ended necessarily through other forms of living, and so that other forms of living, become possible (Hartman, 2019; Simone, 2019).

Reading the human and magic through racializing assemblages

Honorable Tajudeen and Mallam Mutawakil’s offerings on the human and magic, the porch conversation with Larry, Fatimatu, and Mustapha on their statements, and the connections I make to scholarship point to a deep relation and interconnectedness between the multiple elements that shape everyday space and spatial experience in Nima neighborhood. These statements, porch conversation, and scholarly connections invoke the entangled relations of bodies, flesh, bones, discourses, encounters, objects and materials, movements, gestures, practices, emotions, and affects as part of the rich multitude of parts which function together and simultaneously independently (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In order to read and theorize spatial experience, I draw on relational and assemblage scholarship, for its attentiveness in recognizing the relations, nonhuman entities, and potentials alongside the human in urban space, particularly concerning children and youth’s everyday experiences (Kimari, 2021; Nxumalo & Delgado Vintimilla, 2020; Krishnan, 2019a). Yet I come to this scholarship with the recognition that much of mainstream assemblage thinking, in articulating a posthuman and more-than-human world, conceptualizes these assemblages as bodies, materials, and affects operating in fluid, impermanent and non-hierarchical relations (DeLanda, 2016) in ways that are

conspicuously silent on narrativized human difference (Krishnan, 2019b; Tiffany Lethabo King, 2017) and can reproduce racial differences and colonialities (McElroy, 2020). This includes such silences in the growing scholarship concerning children's geographies and spatial experiences that draw from these theories (Cortés-Morales, 2020; Shand, 2018). This insufficient engagement with race in the conceptual framing of this scholarship threatens to retain the "descriptive statement" of the human as western European bourgeois man as the fully human, rational, and political subject, and the concomitant disciplining of human beings into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans (Weheliye, 2014). Krishnan (2019) notes that:

"the mainstay of posthumanist scholarship – driven by a genealogy that draws from Foucault's call to denaturalise the category of 'Man' (Foucault, 2005 [1966]) and speaks through Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour – rarely engages the critique of Eurocentric 'Man' as the paradigmatic human subject in the work of Black social theorists, and particularly black feminist and queer scholars."
(Krishnan, 2019b, p. 3)

Working with this critique, I draw on relational and assemblage thinking and scholarship that forefronts race (and in particular, Blackness, and Black epistemologies) in order to pursue understandings of children in Nima, who negotiate their humanness, including the ways they are made less-than-human and their spatial environment uninhabitable, and to question the bases upon which their less-than-human experiences and inhabitable environments are constituted (Nxumalo, 2020a; Ohito, 2019; Prats Ferret, 2011). I draw on this thinking to conceptually frame this thesis approach, focusing on children's spatial experiences as they emerge from relations between the human, material, magic, and affective aspects of Nima community spaces.

Specifically, I turn toward Alexander Weheliye's (2014) "racializing assemblages," an approach he builds from his own engagement with Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter's work to frame race and racialization as an assemblage of socio-political processes that discipline humanity into different genres of human (ranging from full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans). The theory demonstrates the layered, relational connectedness between racialization, the human, and political violence in our modern era. Rather than conceptualizing Blackness as a biological category, Weheliye conceptualizes racialization as a relation perpetuated via multiple and entangled "institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts," which converge

to produce difference and to discipline humanity into hierarchies of full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans (2014, p. 4). Weheliye locates his theorizing within the intellectual tradition of Black Studies, which bears witness to the construction and maintenance of hierarchical distinctions between groups of humans, producing rich critiques problematizing western colonialities/modernities, and also imagining alternatives (Weheliye, 2014, p. 3) from the situated locations of those racialized as Black.

Weheliye draws upon several visual artistic works that represent political violence meted upon individuals and groups made less-than-human in various geographies and times. As such, he demonstrates the formations and operations of racializing assemblages as subjection. He also works across cultural archives and testimonies to demonstrate how individuals produce and imagine small spaces and openings of social life, as “insurgent praxes of humanity” (2014, p. 113), which also exist within sites and experiences of political violence.

In the first instance (of subjection), he discusses the film *Sankofa* (1993) in which an African-American fashion model on 1980s photo shoot in the shadow of the immense Elmina Castle (a former slave-trading fort in Ghana, now heritage tourism site), upon visiting the underground dungeon is transported to time of trans-Atlantic slavery, where in this same space, she is transmuted into an African body subjected to the bodily and psychic violences of chattel slavery. The film dramatically portrays her embodiment of “dysselection...through the process of becoming an en fleshed slave” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 103). In and through this existence as enslaved property, she is made explicitly subhuman (a commodified, stripped, branded, shipped, tortured, laboring body), a process made visible through a graphic visual accounting.

In the other instance (of producing small spaces and openings of social life), he turns to Harriet Jacobs’ self-written memoir *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861). He focuses in particular on Jacob’s seven-year long period of hiding in a tightly cramped, windowless attic space above her grandmother’s shed, her only means of eluding slavery and the sexual advances of her master while remaining in close proximity to her family. Like the fashion model-turned-enslaved woman in the *Sankofa* film, Jacobs’ existence as enslaved property is predicated on her being made subhuman through the political violence of racialized slavery. Yet her hiding demonstrates an insurgent practice: This cramped and concealed “loophole of retreat” (Jacobs, 2003, p. 173) was “the last place they [slave owner and slave catchers] thought of” (Jacobs, 2003, p. 178) to

search for her, which enabled her escape to freedom. Notably, this ordeal, which was essential to facilitating her freedom, also left her with lifelong disability, which ensured that “the hieroglyphics of the flesh remained affixed to her physical being-in-the-world” even in her passage to freedom (Weheliye, 2014, p. 117). This account demonstrates the potential of these small spaces and to create small spaces, which I connect to practices of magic, through inherently, unexpected, even small but inventive spatial practices.

Weheliye also considers C.L.R. James’ ordeal facing deportation by U.S Immigration and Naturalization Service. In the two-year period of hearings, part of deportation proceedings, and his four-month detainment (imprisonment), his subjection as an illegal alien and foreign subversive left him stripped of the legal right to testify on his own behalf before congressional committee. Yet within this space and time, James wrote the text *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (1953) to speak from his enfleshed experience (where “on the island...an alien is not a human being” (Weheliye citing James, 1953, p. 140). James, writing of his physical imprisonment, digestive issues, and inability to consume the food served to him, produces this book as his own “text and legal testimony, and thus transform[s] his imprisonment into a productive critique of U.S. empire and the nutritional politics of immigration policy” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 116). This account demonstrates for me the space of the page, and narratives and storytelling as productive spaces of operating otherwise.

I employ Weheliye’s theory of racializing assemblages to frame my own Black feminist engagement and reading of Black bodies and assemblages to read how children’s spatial experiences in Nima are lived, felt, and mired within the afterlife of slavery and colonialism in urban Ghana, where, to think with architect and urbanist Mpho Matsipa, there exists “an imagined rupture” between the “past” of slavery and colonialism” and the “present” of post-independence, yet “the pastness is still very much part of the present” (Lambert & Matsipa, 2020). In this study of children’s spatial experiences in community space, assemblage theorizing and in particular, this approach of racializing assemblages, is useful for tracing the clustered, interconnected parts from which children’s everyday experiences emerge, from which they are made less-than-human, and in which they also inhabit space, move and make place for their bodies within it, and imagine in space towards inventive and wayward alternatives. These interconnected parts include the global and local discourses, histories, infrastructures, materials, affect, bodies, interpersonal relations, and power dynamics in place. This theorizing holds space for the experiences of subjection, while recognizing that these structures and experiences

cannot annihilate “the lines of flight, freedom dreams, practices of liberation, and possibilities of other worlds” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 2). Weheliye’s theory possesses the breadth to work through Nima residents and SOI team members and my conceptualizations of both the forms of marginalization and enclosure within the less-than-human experiences under view in Nima, as well as the inventive operations of magic, which again Mallam Mutawakil articulates as one’s bringing together “human might” and their “human mind” to make the impossible possible in their environment:

“a technological assemblage of humanity, technology circumscribed here in the broadest sense as the application of knowledge to the practical aims of human life or to changing and manipulating the human environment...The particular assemblage of humanity under purview here...insists on the importance of miniscule movements, glimmers of hope, scraps of food, the interrupted dreams of freedom found in those spaces deemed devoid of full human life...they represent alternative critical, political, and poetic assemblages...” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 12)

This theory is grounded in thinking through the primary narrative of the flesh and discourses of the human. In addition, following Black feminist lineages, this theory opens up a space of potentiality for this thesis, offering a way to conceptualize racialization as an assemblage that shapes embodied subjection, as well as comprehending alternative modes of life. My reaching toward a comprehension of these alternative modes of life, made visible through an attentiveness to everyday magic, also necessitates attention to this as a spatially grounded practice. I bring this together through a reading Honorable Tajudeen and Mallam Mutawakil’s offerings, our porch conversation, and theorizations with the human, magic through the concept of the uninhabitable. This conceptually grounds the research in space to respond to the demands of the human, magic, and racializing assemblages and to focus on humanity as it is lived and imagined by those excluded from this domain, and to ultimately, consider more fully the modalities of humanity.

Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the methodological approach undertaken by Larry, Fati, Mustapha and me during my time in Nima, as well as my approach operating individually at various moments before, during, and after our activities together in Nima. I map our methodological decisions and techniques for producing knowledge according to the Black feminist epistemological approach that I elaborated in the previous chapter (Chapter 3). In the sections that follow, I relate how we structure of our activities and my attendant ethical considerations in this knowledge production process, which answers and reflects on these two research questions:

- RQ1** How do children articulate their everyday embodied experiences of community space in Nima?
- RQ2** How do children in their practices of inhabiting community space in Nima practice, perform, and imagine other ways of being and doing outside of dominant spatial frames?

Our activities in Nima take place over a period of 10.5 months, spread over my three stays. During this time, Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha, and I plan and conduct a series of arts-based, participatory methods activities with 17 SOI students (girls and boys 10-17 years old). Our work together is a rich, creative, and productive experience investigating children's everyday spatial experiences and spatial practices through their production of visual materials and textual narratives, a co-produced community event, and a participatory analysis process. In elaborating each step in this process, I detail our methodological decisions and our shared and individual roles, from recruiting SOI students, to structuring and facilitating the workshops, to co-organizing the community event, and my further work in recording and transcribing the SOI students' lived and told stories and my thesis writing approach.

Ethics: Positionality, cooperation, and care

In the previous chapter, I demonstrate how the SOI front office porch opens up to the world of Nima and its inhabitants; in this section, I describe my positioning within this social world and collaborative research encounter with the SOI team members and students. Here I reflexively consider my positionality in this research project and the political nature of spatial research as a subjectively driven process for producing knowledge of place through our methodological frameworks, with the

inevitable complexities, unequal power dynamics, our shared and unshared accountabilities. I discuss the interrelated ethics of positionality, cooperation, and care. While I structure this into separate subsections, I recognize their interrelatedness and how they weave across and show up in many parts of our research project and this thesis.

Researcher positionality

I acknowledge how my own self-understanding, our identities, our relations, and place come together and influence the research process, from the research design, methodology, and interpretations, to writing of this thesis (Rose, 1997; Haraway, 1988). I also attend to how our identities are embedded within inescapable power dynamics that shape the research interaction. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, while I come to Nima through a years-long friendship with Larry and have some lived familiarity with and previous contextual knowledge of Accra and Nima, these aspects of difference are critical in that I come into this collaboration with a different background than the SOI team members and students. I come to this research as an outsider, as someone from a different upbringing, ethnic and national identity, language, religious identity, and geographic location than the SOI team members and students. For example, I enter Nima and this research encounter as someone raised Catholic, who is now spiritual, and so not a Muslim like many of the SOI team members and students, nor a devout Christian, like four of the SOI students involved in the research. That I am not religious in a context of deep religiosity shapes and at times limits my understanding of their worlds. These and other differences, for example, between their African indigenous identity and my diasporan identity, are key in locating me as an outsider in our collaboration and the research process.

From when I arrive to the SOI office, I am part of the organization's history of welcoming African diasporan, and specifically African-American, interns and researchers to work with SOI students as part of the organization's Pan-Africanist approach. As a Black woman, born and raised in a middle-class family in the US, and someone who speaks English with a US accent, I am in many ways similar to the African-Americans whom SOI invites and who interact with the SOI students, and those who visit and repatriate to Ghana more generally (Pierre, 2013). I also identify as a US-born Igbo diasporan (of US and Nigerian nationality) negotiating and building my own connections to my indigenous culture through a deliberate and continuous process of (un)learning coloniality. My stays in Ghana and Nigeria have been part of this process of rebuilding these connections, and also building awareness of the colonial baggage that I inherited and still carry. I grew up and

studied in the US (now the UK), and worked in Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa – all racially structured societies, which shapes the way I see the world, my understandings and perceptions of race and Blackness, and also the deep connections I perceive between Black peoples and cultures globally. Through our multiple encounters through this research process, my positionality as a Black diasporan woman evolves as the SOI students and I learn more about each other. For example, when I have to make trips to Nigeria to help organize and then attend an uncle’s funeral, it generates conversations with SOI students where we discuss how I am both African-American and an Igbo diasporan. In another example, one of the SOI students, a 14-year-old boy, produces a story (as part of a storytelling workshop described later in this chapter). In his story, he describes me as “a Diasporan called Aunty Victoria.” His reference to me as “Aunty” also highlights that the SOI students recognize me as an adult, like Larry, Fatimatu, and Mustapha. So, while I have worked with children and youth in Accra, my adulthood shapes the ways I relate to the SOI students and how they in turn relate to me. I also point out here that Larry and I are in our thirties, while Mustapha and Fati are in their mid-twenties.

My disciplinary background and professional experience in Urban Studies and Planning, which I have studied in the US and UK (and to a limited extent at the University of Ghana) also shape my lens of the world and how I approach this research. It is from my current base in a UK university that I meet the SOI team members and students to collaboratively research in Nima, a global majority context (Noxolo, 2009). This also shapes how we relate together in this research process, where I position myself (and am positioned) as a doctoral researcher. This also connects to the fact that we each come to this research project on unequal economic footing: I am funded by a UK university, working with a local NGO based in a neighborhood that has been under-resourced and disenfranchised in myriad ways, part of power dynamics within our research collaboration (Hamilton, 2020).

My reliance on the English language, which informs how I move through the world, also shapes and limits the communication of knowledges within this research project. I do not speak well Hausa or Twi, the main languages spoken in the SOI office and in Nima. The main language we use in this research process is English, which is an accommodation the SOI team members and students make to facilitate my understanding. This means that throughout this research process, the SOI team members and students constantly interpret their worlds into English: My language limitations place additional labor on the SOI team and students, which they must

expend within our research together.²⁶ I say this while also recognizing that English is the national language in Ghana, and from Year 4 at the primary level, English is the language of instruction in all schools (Bronteng, Berson, & Berson, 2020). All of the SOI student participants involved in this research project are enrolled in school, and they speak, read, and write English with ease. However, they experience the language as one of instruction and formality, unlike their local languages that they normally use in their homes, between friends, and on the street - which means that the language we operate in for the purposes of our research project is distinct from the language of their personal and intimate worlds. We mitigated, but couldn't fully address, this limitation by presenting the workshops in English, Hausa, and Twi, by inviting students to share in the language of their choice with one of the SOI team members providing interpretation, and by running the community event almost entirely in Hausa. Despite these efforts, English dominates as the primary mode of our interactions and communications, despite efforts to make space for other languages. Operating in English makes language a site of struggle for the participants when they seek to communicate their lived experiences, ideas, and insights (hooks, 1989). Even in moments when Larry, Fati, and Mustapha encourage some children to communicate in their preferred language, I still read what I interpret as their discomfort and pressure to perform an ability to communicate in English like their peers. In centering English for me (the PhD researcher), I therefore reproduce a particular western epistemic dominance in a space where we aim to tackle this very issue (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 1999).

Gendered power dynamics also permeate our research relationship. The everyday social, cultural, and religious practices in Nima that tend to center women and girls as caretakers also skews our participation in certain activities. For example, Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha, as well as the SOI students understand cleaning up and attending to the children's needs as largely Fatimatu's gendered and professional responsibility. As a result, in instances where the four of us come together in the office to plan or reflect on workshops, at times, these duties pull Fatimatu away. In response, I try to help Fatimatu in these activities when I can, or I take the initiative to pause our planning activities to give Fatimatu time to return, or, if the discussion continues in her absence, I take the time to catch her up when she returns. These

²⁶ For example, in the chapter narrating conversations with elders on Nima's (hi)stories, my language limitations require Larry to do the labor of interpreting for an entire interview with Madame Abiba Suleiman. Throughout the interview, she speaks in Hausa, I speak in English, and he interprets between us. This both facilitates our conversation, but also requires that he communicates my questions and her responses through his own understandings and worldview in English.

become moments and spaces not only where Fatimatu is less able to participate in and contribute to our research process, but also these moments highlight an important distinction between Fatimatu, who as a Ghanaian woman working in the SOI office in Nima who bears this gendered responsibility, and me (a Black woman and foreigner who is a guest in the SOI office), who is exempt from this responsibility.

Cooperation (hadin kai)

In our first workshop with the SOI students, we initiate a group conversation to establish our ways of working together, core values that were important for members in the group that we would work to uphold throughout our interactions together. I term these as our “ground rules” and they include: respect towards one another in our words and actions, giving each other space and opportunity to speak and contribute, listening and learning from others (rather than immediately disagreeing with someone else’s opinion or experience, to recognize this as adding another perspective, to ensure everyone has a right to their own experience and opinion), and cooperation. Abdallah, one of the SOI students, describes the concept of cooperation as “hadin kai” in Hausa language: that our success depends on our working together.

This informs Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha, and my approach to each method, as an open opportunity for collaborative decision making to shape the process that we undertake together. We also build openings to become aware, to reflect on, and to discuss complexities and conflicts as they arise during the research process (Banks et al., 2013). However, it was clear to all of us from the start that this is my funded doctoral research project, which I am academically responsible for, a project and process tied up with university timelines and ethical approval processes, placing limitations on our collaborative project as fully open and flexible. Within these mutually recognized imbalanced relations, we do create spaces for shaping the research together. At each moment when we agree to do a participatory method, such as a photography workshop, a mapping workshop, or a storytelling workshop, we sit down together. “We have said we will do this workshop,” I might say, “how should we go about it?” In the ensuing conversation, we ask questions, we throw out ideas, we debate, we share past experiences and opinions, and through that, shape together a structure and approach, then assign roles and put in place an agreed agenda. Through these inputs, we shape workshops accommodating key considerations like prayer times, mealtimes, the children’s familial obligations and attention spans. Particularly important for me, each of us play a formative role in shaping each workshop. Early on, we develop a process of planning each workshop

by working through the process ourselves to produce and discuss the materials we intend to ask the children to produce. This supports our experiences as facilitators. After each workshop, the four of us come back together again, for a short chat about what works well, what we struggle with, and how to keep improving and adjusting.

Care

In this feminist research, I attend not only to an awareness of power in our research relationship but also to addressing these injustices in both our research and personal interactions through care, using “self-care, daily resistance practices, and positive supportive community building” as an essential component within our research (Caretta & Faria, 2020, p. 2) Our relationships of care, enacted in small and big ways, sustain the SOI, myself, and our research project in our activities in Nima because of the connections we have and build with each other. I become a regular at the NGO office, visiting four times a week, and not only for specific research activities. I often come just to be around and to help out with their own activities. Sometimes this means helping Fatimatu as she teaches the kids Corel Draw, or typing, or PowerPoint. Sometimes this is to read with any of the SOI students who came to the NGO to practice with the books in the library, whether they are participating in this research project or not. Sometimes this is watching movies on one of the desktop computers, like the animated film *Spiderman: Into the Spider-verse*. These gestures are also reciprocated in numerous, and more profound ways:

I am thinking today about ethics of care in the research process. How do we also take care of each other, we who are doing research together? I am thinking of how Larry buys for me alele as the hour of iftar approaches - it is a gesture of kindness. I am thinking of how Fati [Fatimatu Mutari] came with me to help negotiate when I wanted to purchase jalabia. I mean, ok, she was a bit shy and didn't so much do the work of negotiating, but it was ok. I am thinking of when today I was tired, and she said, "Vic, take a nap," and laid out the prayer rugs for me to lie down on the floor. And how it's ok if I fall asleep or need to take a nap, it's totally ok, and Tikas or Mutawakil will only comment afterward, laughing, "you were really sleeping!" But it's not judgment - it's that they can see that I needed it, and they at times do it, too. How Mustapha and Larry walk me to the trotro station, always escorting me when I am leaving in the evening, in part to see me off, but also for the practical reasons of making sure I don't have any issues on my way out. It is a way of looking out for me. It is a way of looking after me. It is me buying the bag of dates for iftar. When, buying biscuits, or roasted corn, or fried yam, I ask who else wants, and then buy for all of us. There is no "I" in

these cases. We take responsibility for and take care of each other, we who are together on this research - it's not just "work" we are doing together, it is also being together. "How are you doing today" is the first and most important question that we start with. A way of looking after each other's bodies and hearts and spirits because we know the world can really run you ragged. (reflective diary, May 15, 2019)

Through these practices of care, we take our time with the research, and we implement "slow scholarship," working together to operate around and outside of the multiple demands of the neoliberal academy and its demands for efficient research and measurable results (Carr & Gibson, 2017). Instead, we use this practice to deepen our ties to one another, "humanizing our work by recentering the intellectual and ethical centrality of friendship, connection, and responsibility" (Caretta & Faria, 2020, p. 8). This is to acknowledge that even within the power relations of our research and the constraints imposed through the PhD timelines and requirements, we also find time and space to produce a "home place" for shelter, nourishment, rest, as an integral component of our research practice (hooks, 1990).

Participation of SOI students

When Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha, and I discuss recruitment for this research project, we agree on gender and age representation, with an aim to balance participation of girls and boys up to 18 years old. Larry and Fatimatu lead this process, and they consider the SOI students who frequently and consistently participate in the NGO's workshops and activities to estimate a willingness to commit to this longer-term project. They identify 17 SOI students (10-17 years) and recruit them, which also involves conversations and permission from the students' parents, to participate in this research project from February 2019 to February 2020. I meet these selected students together in a first afternoon session, which Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha and I use to introduce the research project. I introduce myself as a Nigerian-American who previously lived in Accra, who is friends with Larry, and has come to do a research project with them, and we explain the basic ideas of the research project, including the research questions and the types of methods-based workshops we have in mind at that point: PhotoVoice and some form of mapping. In meeting and talking with the SOI students, I am reminded of children's open and curious natures, and the SOI students demonstrate strong interests in learning and expressing themselves. After this first meeting, I write in my reflective diary:

They are so smart, thoughtful, attentive, and curious. I am excited because I feel that with our activities, we are tapping into their creative potentials, and also the areas of creativity that they are excited to explore. After the session, Emmanuel showed me a short story that he has written. It was a fantasy story about two wicked and cruel kings who fight to the death over a beautiful women. The two kings kill each other, and people in the kingdoms live happily ever after. I need to ask Emmanuel: What inspired him to write this story, what is the message that he wants to communicate through this tale? He said he had been working on it for about two days. (reflective diary, February 16, 2019)

In the course of our research, the students write down their own self-descriptions, where they describe themselves in their own words. Their self-descriptions demonstrate each individual's uniqueness, their self-understanding, and how they differentiate between themselves within this group. They write these self-descriptions as responses to answer the question "What makes you YOU?" which was the first question on the end-of-project exam two of the students requested as we finished our work together. I include the self-descriptions produced by the students, and I use these self-introductions in the next chapter (Chapter 5) to forefront the children's individual identities and positions in discussing their stories and other materials through which they share their lived experiences of community space in the next chapter.

Research methods

Participatory arts-based spatial research with children

Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha, and I co-design several arts-based, participatory methods within this research project. In our approach, rather than deciding the entire trajectory of our methodology in advance, we decide each method one by one. We plan a workshop, and then take time for reflection afterward, and use these reflections as basis to inform the subsequent research method workshop in our process. In this process, each research method workshop builds on the previous one. This enables us to design a program in line with SOI's existing forms of children and youth engagement, and that fully involves the SOI team members as much as possible in these decision-making processes. Together we design a series of participatory, arts-based methods oriented to working with children, in order to hold space for children's voices, self-expression, and perspectives, rather than focusing on engagements with dominant authorities in society who are typically consulted on children's issues (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2019).

An essential element that we shape in collaboration is the use of participatory methods, in which we ask the SOI students to individually and at times collectively produce textual and visual materials, and in key moments, to participate in the planning of particular activities. There is a long history of participatory research in geography and urban studies, as well as in the related disciplines of anthropology and sociology (Fromille et al., 2020; McTighe & Haywood, 2018; Bressey, 2014; Coombes, Johnson, & Howitt, 2014). For example, in a participatory community heritage project with Black youth in Brixton, London, youth conducted 30 oral history interviews with older local residents and activists in order to center these older individuals as “living archives” and produce relational encounters and exchanges, challenging the preservation of material object archives for the neighborhood’s history (Mullings-Lawrence, 2019). In general, participatory research with children concerns “the co-construction of meanings and understanding” in the research process, where the children play an active role in the construction of knowledge, including in the research design, an embedded involvement in methods of information gathering, analysis and interpretation, and knowledge sharing, or a mix of these (Coyne & Carter, 2018, p. 2). Working with children using participatory research processes demands interactive, reflexive, and engaged research, where the adults are co-learners to the children who are also co-researchers. This form of research takes place within “the messy, unpredictable, real world of children’s lives” and thus must attend to the inherent power dynamics within the research process, considering children’s opportunity for increased voice, as well as considerations for ethical questions of consent (Water, 2018, p. 38). In the instance of this research project, we worked through the ethical protocols of the University, and SOI, which secured consent from each SOI students’ parents as requirement to their participation in this research process. This demonstrates two layers of “gatekeepers” through whom this research was negotiated before the children could participate in the research process (Water, 2018).

This collaborative research draws on creative (arts-based) approaches in order to investigate children’s spatial experiences and practices in Nima, in order to provide space for the SOI students to creatively express themselves. Taking inspiration from SOI’s existing approaches of working with artists and running creative and arts-based workshops with children and youth, this approach on arts-based activities combines geographic knowledge-making and artistic practice to enable creative empirical engagements (Eshun & Madge, 2016). This approach is also in line with creative geographies approaches, which produce and present space and spatial experiences through curated, collaborative, or individual artworks, images, creative writing, and performances (Bates et al., 2018; Hawkins, 2015). This approach also

privileges, through attention to creative and artistic expressions, the poetic and nuanced registers of Black life as lived in Nima (Quashie, 2021).

Table 2. Research workshops and activities with SOI students

WORKSHOP / ACTIVITY	TIME PERIOD
Semi-structured interviews with Nima community elders and government authorities	January - August 2019 (most interviews in January and February; last interview in August)
PhotoVoice workshop	March 2, 3, and 6, 2019 (3 days)
Body mapping workshop	March 16, 2019 (1 day). We redo the workshop on March 30-31, 2019 (2 days)
Group mapping workshop	April 30-May 1, 2019 (2 days)
Storytelling workshop	May 19, 2019 (1 day)
Community street event (street occupation as site-specific event)	June 22, 2019 (1 day)
Collaborative analysis workshop	Group 1: January 25-26, 2020 (2 days) Group 2: February 1-2, 2020 (2 days)

Selection of spatial typologies

We (SOI team members, SOI students, and I) initiate our first workshop with an open discussion on the spatial typologies to focus on for this research project. We discuss our shared and differing understandings of community space and public space and what they look like and how they operate in Nima. We then collectively build together a list of four types of spaces that we agree to focus on in this research in Nima neighborhood: lungus (alleyways and pedestrian pathways between dwellings and buildings), streets, sidewalk pavements, and open spaces. This conversation builds between us a shared understanding of “community space” in Nima and which spaces we have in mind when documenting and speaking on these spaces.

PhotoVoice (participatory photography)

Researchers use PhotoVoice, a form of participatory photography, in a diverse range of contexts. As an approach, this method uses a thematic focus, exercises in

which participants use cameras to document aspects of their lived experience, which they share and discuss in group dialogue, an awareness of unequal, gendered relationships, and documentary photography to upend the traditional photographer-subject paradigm (Wang & Burris, 1997). Black feminist and feminist researchers have employed the PhotoVoice method as a form of participatory photography that enables individuals to articulate their own lived experiences, by capturing their own photos by camera and writing their own textual descriptions, often with further discussion via photograph-elicited interviews. From migrant women head porters who frame their classed and gendered everyday market experiences, vulnerabilities, and collective support practices in Accra (Bowles, 2017) to families depicting their everyday, mundane negotiation of power, oppression and colonialism in Mexico and the US settler colonial context (Pérez & Saavedra, 2017), this method is widely used for its ability to enable individual voice. In this research, the SOI students, who are insiders in Nima community, are at the center of this method, and they document their own lives and then represent their narratives to the outside world, whereas the role of Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha and me is as facilitators (Sutton-Brown, 2014; Castleden, Garvin, & Nation, 2008).

Larry, Fati, and Mustapha select PhotoVoice as the creative and arts-based method for our first workshop, and our shared desire to work with participatory photography is rooted in our own successful past experiences.²⁷ We initiate our collaborative research process with the SOI students with a three-day PhotoVoice workshop, and we contextualize the PhotoVoice methodology approach to our needs and Nima's context. Mustapha, Fati, Larry and I developed the agenda and series of events, working from the existing practices they had used in previous PhotoVoice workshops that they organized.²⁸

We use this first workshop to build a positive relationship between the youth participants and me and to generate creative ideas for further workshops. The workshop is a space in which the youth participants reflect on and discuss the ways different Nima residents claim and use specific spaces in Nima, and the children also share their own experiences claiming and using these spaces, along with what these spaces mean for them and other young people. We ask the SOI students to

²⁷ SOI partnered with US-based academics and students to run a PhotoVoice workshop documenting everyday life for SOI students in Nima (Aminu, 2018, interview). I had previously partnered with an NGO and professional photographer to run a youth photography workshop series and exhibition in 2016 and 2017.

²⁸ The full agenda for our PhotoVoice workshop is included in the Appendix.

work together in groups to select and photodocument meaningful space in two separate outings. We also provide them notebooks, and we ask them to take any notes they like on the images they capture. We facilitators compile their photos, which I then print out. On the third day of the workshop, we ask the participants to select their favorite four photos from among those they themselves had captured over the first two days, and to write photo stories (captions) to describe and produce short descriptions for each photo.



Image 13. SOI student writes her caption in the PhotoVoice process (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

We organize an exhibition on the walls of the SOI office of children’s favorite photos, so that the SOI students can see and comment on each other’s images and stories. Then we hold a group presentation session, where each SOI student takes their turn to present and discuss their photos with the group. To close the workshop, we hold another group discussion session where we ask the children to reflect on their experiences of the workshop, the differences captured across their different photos, as well as how from their embodied positions – as children, as boys, and as girls – shape their experiences and the spaces they capture. The children also mention the parts of the workshop they enjoyed the most, what they found difficult, what they learned from each other about their neighborhood.

With this research workshop, we work together to define community space, and we begin with a method that the SOI students are deeply familiar with. We the facilitators ask the SOI students to use this method to explore, document, and describe the activities they notice happening around them in community space.

Through their photos and captions, the SOI students produce visual and textual details of the existing conditions and realities of community space, grounded in their own lived experiences, and the SOI students also learn about each other's lived experiences.

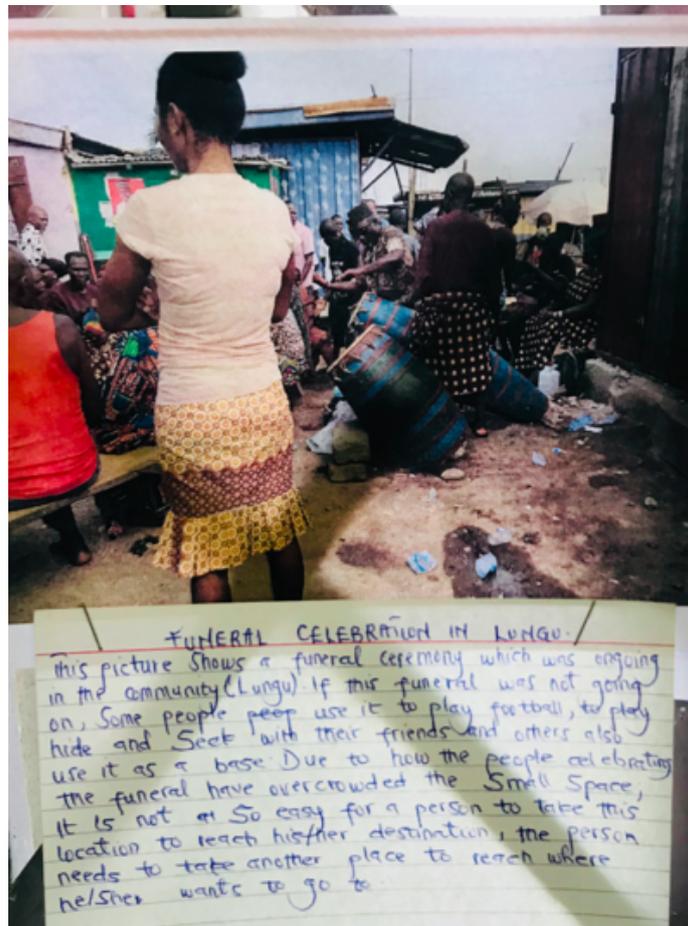


Image 14. PhotoVoice image and caption produced by SOI student (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

Body mapping

Body mapping is an art-based method originating from individual and community health-related research. In the body mapping process, the individual produces a “life-size human body image” using drawing, painting, writing, or collage, in order to visually depict various aspects of their lived experience and body, which must be understood in relation with the participant’s overall personal story and position in the world (Gastaldo et al., 2012, p. 5). These maps serve as information in and of themselves, but are also often accompanied by the use of questioning or discussion to elicit more information by probing the meanings behind their artwork (Rollins, 2018). Earliest uses of body mapping are from art therapy research in South Africa, where women used text and images to describe their life journeys, as well as a

psychology project in which South African women living with HIV/AIDS produced visual records of their lives for their families (Devine, 2008). Body mapping has since been employed in a growing number of social science fields, such as exploring women's lived experiences of gendered violence (Escalante & Sweet, 2015), and undocumented workers navigating their precarious conditions (Gastaldo et al., 2012). Beginning from a "canvas that is the physical outline of their bodies" on paper, body mapping as method "help[s] participants reflect on the connection of their minds, bodies, feelings, thoughts, experiences, and social interactions" and provides means in which an individual can express their "experiential states" (Skop, 2016, p. 31). As an art-based method, body mapping allows "self-expression beyond the bounds of one's body or the categories thrust upon individuals by society" as well as a means of sensitively conveying the complex intersectional identities and lived experiences (Furman et al., 2019, p. 2).

The process of producing a body map takes time, and the process gives time and space for an individual to reflect on the contexts of her/his map, making and depicting connections that otherwise might not arise in the direct manners employed in traditional qualitative approaches such as interviewing (Hartman et al., 2011). We use this method to understand and discuss the SOI students' individual experiences in community space as embodied experiences, with the emphasis that all of their spatial experiences and practices take place through their own bodies in space. This method of mapping their corporeal experiences becomes a means of representing their experiences and making connections to their memories, emotions, and perceptions.

In our process, Larry, Fatimatu, and Mustapha are joined by some additional SOI team members to facilitate the workshop. We begin with each SOI student lying down on a large sheet of paper, while one of the facilitators traces their body's outline onto the sheet of paper. Working within or outside this traced body outline, each SOI student then uses colored markers and drawings and text to illustrate their experiences of claiming and using community spaces. In many instances, the SOI students use the space outside their body to depict spaces or experiences within the community that they don't have access to, or that they avoid. After completing their body map, each individual presents theirs, answering any questions about their artwork.

It takes two iterations of this workshop for us to conduct it effectively. In the first instance, we the facilitators realize that once SOI students began, there is some confusion with our directions and guidance. Rather than proceeding, we decide to

pause and adjust our approach, so that we can break down the workshop into smaller exercises, take our time to make sure each of the SOI students fully understands each exercise, and build in more spaces of reflection for the SOI students, so they can prepare in advance of working on their individual body maps.



Image 15. Body mapping workshop (Photo by Larry Aminu)

In anticipation of the second workshop, we facilitators test out the practice between us. First, we generate specific prompts for the children's creation of body maps. We use the following questions:

- What are activities you do in community space?
- What are your memories of these activities?
- What emotions, feelings, and opinions do you have about these activities and these spaces?
- What then is your personal connection to that location, based on the activities, memories, and emotions they have to the space?

Each of us (Fatima, Larry, Mustapha, Abubakar and myself) create our own individual body maps, we present our body maps to each other, and we ask each other questions about our maps. During this moment, two of the SOI students participating in the research come to the office, and we involve them in our planning to ensure we are able to explain these steps clearly to the other children. This becomes a means of testing out our practice before working with the full group of SOI students.



Image 16. Larry Aminu presents his body map to the other facilitators (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

When we come back together with the SOI students for the first day of the second body mapping workshop, we explain again to the children the concept of body mapping, this time showing our own example body maps and taking questions. We write down of the above prompts as a step on the whiteboard, and we walk through each part with the group, demonstrating the connections. Then we ask for volunteers among the SOI students who are willing to work through their own examples with the rest of us, to demonstrate the process from the children's own perspectives. We work through two examples from the SOI students in this manner.

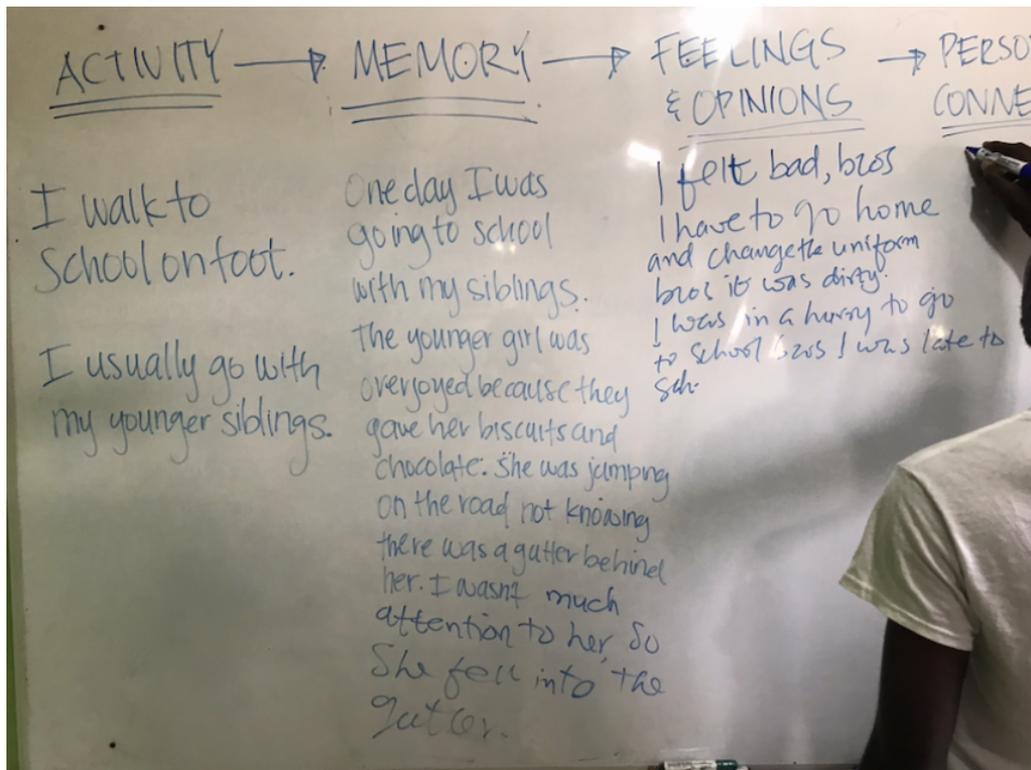


Image 17. Mustapha records SOI student's experiences in body mapping workshop (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

We then assign the students with a writing task to work on in their individual notebooks. We ask them to think with the question prompts and to take their time to generate their ideas, personal examples, and experiences that they can include in their own body maps, for the workshop session the following weekend. During the week in between these sessions, we are in the office and some of the children show us their work so we can help ensure they understand all of our guidance. When we meet for the second day of the workshop, we offer the SOI students the option to add to their previous body map or to start a new one. They use ideas and notes they have recorded in their notebooks, and each works on their individual body map. When they complete their body maps, we do a small exhibition and each SOI student presents their work, describing the different elements within their body maps.

With this research workshop, we the facilitators devise an exercise where the SOI students express their spatial experiences as embodied and situated. We ask them to frame their spatial experiences by drawing on the relationship between space and their bodies and by focusing on their sensory experiences, memories, feelings, and hopes and desires produced by their lived experiences in community space.

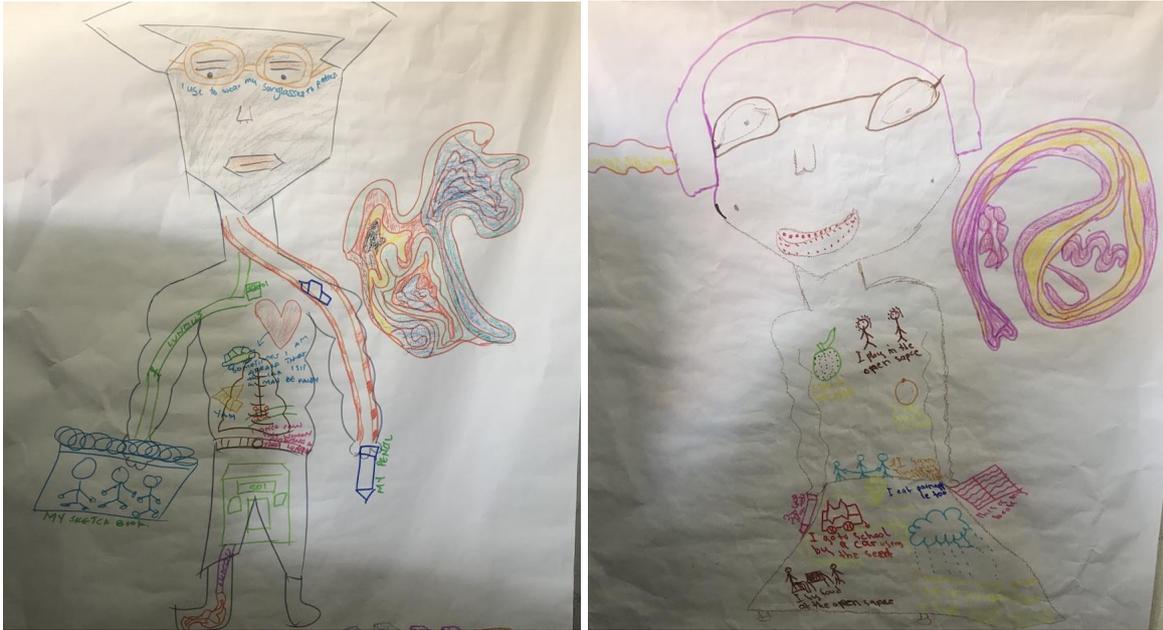


Image 18. Two body maps produced by SOI students (Photos by Victoria Okoye)

Participatory (group) spatial mapping

In this participatory approach, individuals work in a group to collectively produce personalized maps of their social environment, everyday experiences, and priorities, drawing on their individual experience to represent their spatial environment (Literat, 2013). This method supports ways of spatially representing lived experience by showing how individuals structure their time and activities in urban space (Wafer, 2017). This method contrasts with the top-down approach in which planners, architects, and policymakers conventionally produce maps and other spaces of representation of static, fixed, and built spaces that render invisible residents' own worlds of their environment (or unbuilt environment). The information produced in participatory map-making can be tangible (such as maps to represent the physical locations of sites of home, business, or play) or intangible (representing relationships between residents, feelings of home, accessibility, or absences). In our approach, this mapping process emphasizes the relationship between the built and infrastructural conditions in the Nima environment, social realities, and the SOI students' individual and shared lived experiences (Mintchev et al., 2019). It also demonstrates the SOI students' awareness of what is happening in their urban environment, and creates space in which they can demonstrate what they might do (or might like to see done) to intervene (Gordon, Elwood, & Mitchell, 2016).

This workshop takes place over a two-day period, and we structure the process such that the SOI students work in shifts to add their contributions into a shared group map and then collectively reflect on each other's contributions. In total, in this

workshop we facilitate the SOI students' production of three large collective maps. Across these three maps, the SOI students color in their contributions using markers, and each SOI student uses the same marker color across the three maps. In the first map, we ask the SOI students to indicate the community spaces in Nima and the activities that they engage in those various locations. The SOI students draw in spaces where they hang out, play, places where they patronize street vendors to buy their food, the community spaces they frequently use to get from one place to another. In the second map, we ask the SOI students indicate their "no-go areas," which we define as the community spaces they cannot enter, use, or fear using for any reason. In this map, the SOI students indicate locations where they feel afraid or threatened, site where they have observed or been involved in accidents, sites where dangerous activities take place. This second map becomes means of the SOI students to make visible their inaccessible geographies. In the third map, we ask the SOI students to indicate their dreams for Nima, to think widely of both the improvements they would like to see in their environment to address existing concerns, and their imaginings for ways community spaces could be used that would cater to their desires for play, leisure, creativity, and rest. In this map, the SOI students introduce infrastructural and service improvements, as well as spaces they dream up and would like to see in Nima, producing a map of dreamed geographies that make visible spaces that center their safety and play. Drawing on the themes around speculative methods, this third maps attempts to "push the boundaries of our own thinking, which includes the stories we tell about the social world" in ways that tape into collective and individual imagination and dreaming (Benjamin, 2016, p. 2).

After their creation of each map, Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha and I facilitate a presentation exercise where each SOI student presents their individual contributions, generating responses and questions from the other children or the SOI team members. I video record each of the SOI students' presentations. With this workshop, we as facilitators devise an exercise where the SOI students to work individually in contributing their ideas onto group maps, while also seeing how their individual experiences map out together on space. By working together in adding their contributions to a shared group map, the students also begin to identify how their individual activities take place in relation with others. In addition to documenting their existing lived experiences, we also use this workshop as space in which the SOI students can imagine and render visible their own speculative futures and possibilities for Nima.



Image 19. Group mapping process (Photos by Victoria Okoye)

Speculative storytelling

The tradition of storytelling in the West African context has a long history. Recognizing storytelling is common in many cultures, in African storytelling, it emphasizes the passing down of traditions, codes, guidance on positive behavior and social order. Stories are woven out of human experience to teach and share life lessons (Tuwe, 2016). This mode of sharing experiences via stories is part of a wide storytelling tradition that is typical to African culture, has been transmitted within Black diasporic cultures, and also operates as a Black feminist epistemological approach for transmitting knowledge (Christian, 2020; Nadar, 2014; Nnaemeka, 2004). Further, storytelling is a method of creative expression that SOI already supports among its students and that many of the SOI students participating in this research already actively engage in, writing stories (and poems) as part of the NGO’s workshops, or independently.

We devise the storytelling workshop for the SOI students to imagine from their personal experiences their desired possibilities for community space grounded in futurity:

“The facts, alone, will not save us. Social change requires novel fictions that reimagine and rework all that is taken for granted about the current structure of society. Such narratives are not meant to convince others of what is, but to expand our own visions of what is possible...novel fictions that reimagine and rework all that is taken for granted about the current structure of the social world— alternatives to capitalism, racism, and patriarchy— are urgently

needed. Fictions, in this sense, are not falsehoods but refashionings through which analysts experiment with different scenarios, trajectories, and reversals, elaborating new values and testing different possibilities for creating more just and equitable societies” (Benjamin, 2016, pp. 1–2)

In the storytelling workshop, our aims as facilitators are for the SOI students to work independently or in groups to connect their existing realities, grounded in the previous methods workshops, with the hopes and dreams they also imagine through story narratives, to imagine scenarios in which their dreams, hopes, and possible futures are realized. Specifically, this method works from the grounds of their lived experiences of community space (which we begin from in the PhotoVoice workshop), emphasizes embodiment (which we explore in the body mapping workshop), and encourages the children to continue working and sharing ideas to connect current realities and possible futures (which we also explore in the group spatial mapping workshop) within the story narrative format of speculative narrative.

The SOI students build their speculative stories from their situated positions of children. We ask them to produce speculative stories that imagine and to illustrate their own desired futures, de-linked from the constraints of time, space, cost, or city plan, and to center their own desires, hopes, and dreams, as well as present modes they use to exist in space and would like to expand. Therefore, in this workshop, the SOI students consider and produce alternative present realities and potential future realities for their neighborhood. Within this scope of imagining speculatively, storytelling plays a powerful role in creating connection between present circumstances and imagined futures that are not yet in existence yet become possible through their very imagining.

Given the SOI students’ existing strong familiarity with this method, we use the storytelling method workshop to introduce the guidance for the students, they have access to the previous arts-based materials they produced, and the SOI students use the remainder of the session to begin planning their stories, either individually or in teams, and we give the children a week to continue working on and complete their stories. Working individually and in groups, the SOI students produce, write, and perform 13 poems and short stories, some with illustrations. Many of the SOI students’ stories begin from the present moment and highlight a particular issue, and then the student(s) follow their own speculative trajectory toward an improvement brought into being through individual or collective community initiative. Fati, Larry, and I then worked with the SOI students to produce a small,

printed anthology of their stories and poems, and we print these copies for the SOI students to keep, and to share with community leaders and the community residents who would attend the community event discussed in the following subsection).

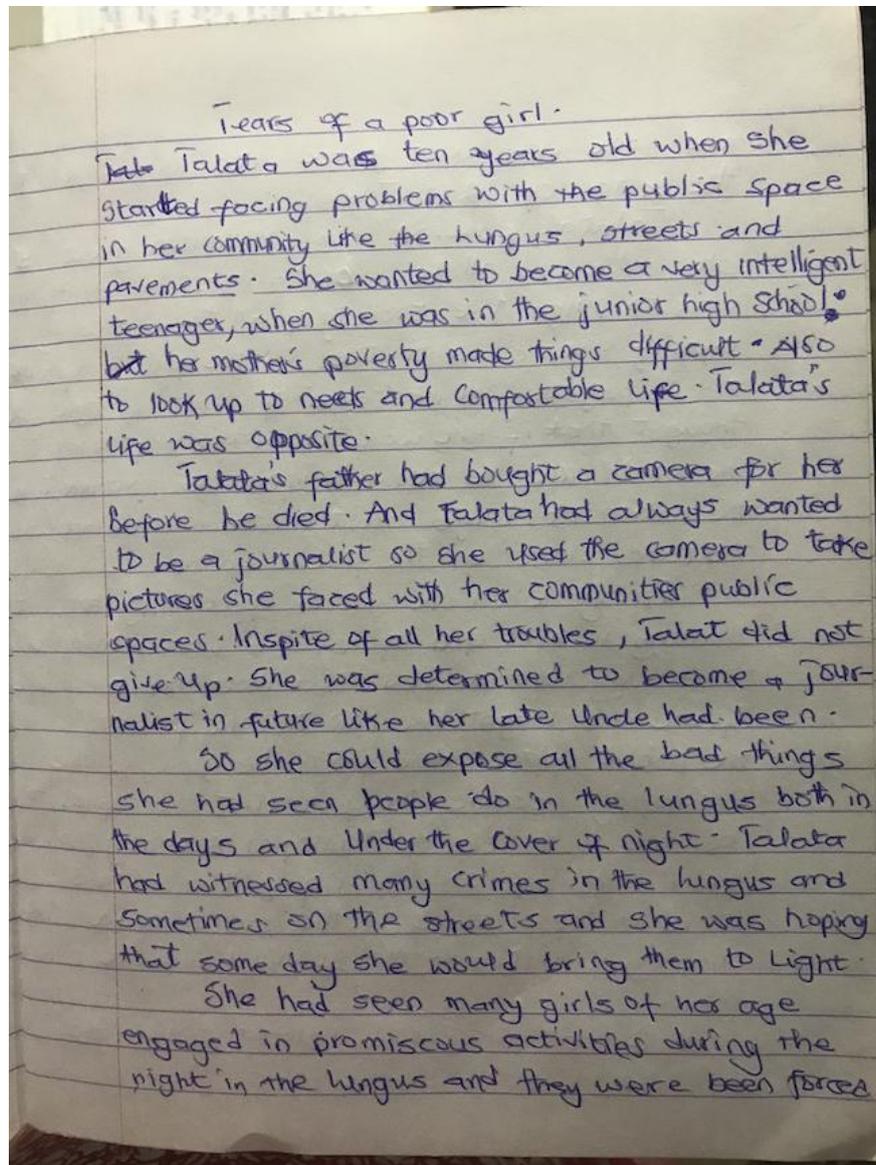


Image 20. SOI student's story produced in storytelling workshop, page 1 (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

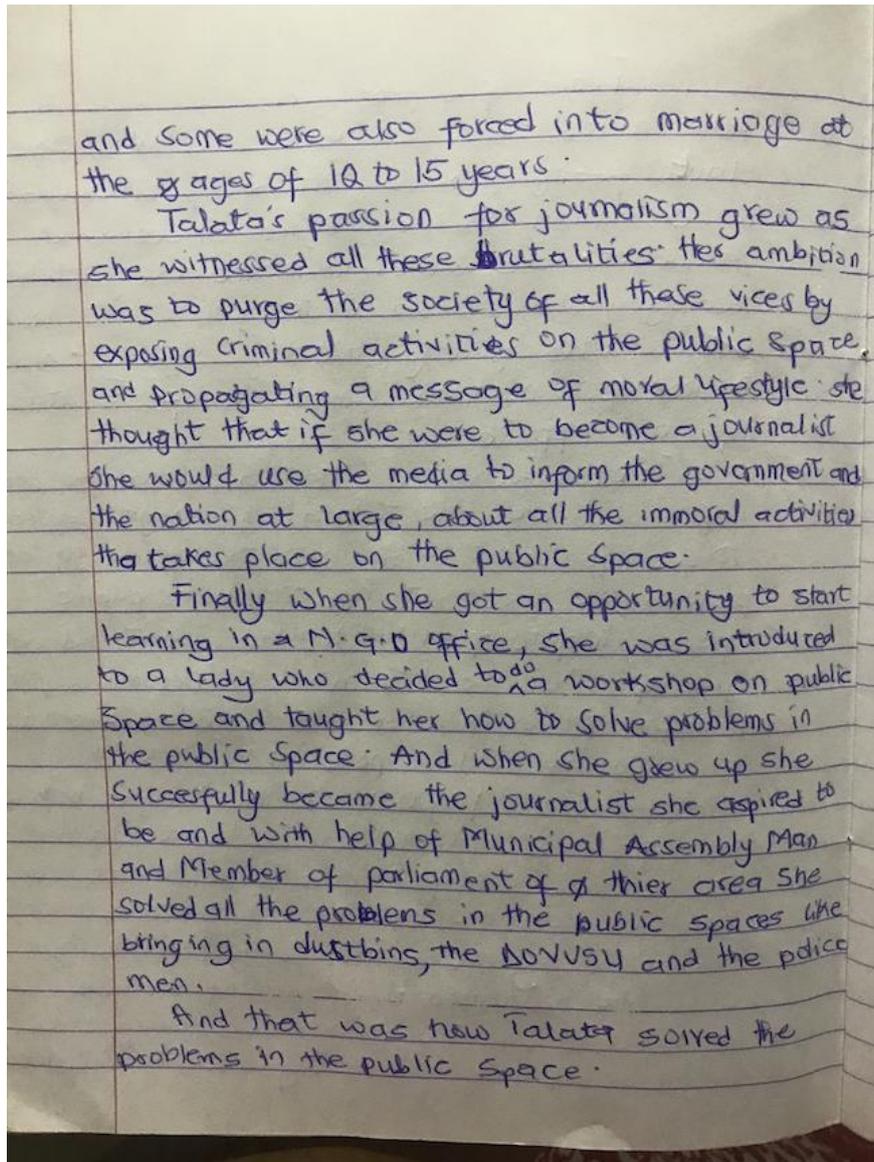


Image 21. SOI student's story produced in storytelling workshop, page 2 (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

Site-specific intervention (community street event)

Early in the research process, when Fatimatu and I ask the SOI students how they would like to share their work within their communities, the children respond with an interest to hold a public event as a means of sharing their research materials and learnings with their friends, family, and wider neighborhood community. We discuss how they would like to organize this event, and the SOI students request to draw on an existing mode through which adults use community spaces – the occupation of the street space. In Accra, it is common for adults to close a portion of the street and to inhabit the space for their religious, cultural, and other activities using rented tents, chairs, and music. While children and adolescents typically participate in

these activities as audience members and spectators, it is rare that children and adolescents are able to take up space in this way themselves. The SOI students continually voice this reality in our discussions across the research workshops, in terms of how adults use space and the experiences that displace the SOI students from community space. This also echoes the Nima elders' stories concerning how community space is claimed and used in Nima. This intervention therefore serves to subvert the very power dynamics that enable adults, but not children, to occupy these spaces in this manner.

The event operates as a site-specific installation or intervention in that it draws its meaning from its very location in the street. A site-specific installation is a large-scale, temporary artistic work constructed with a mix of materials and designed as an intervention in a particular location for its relationship with that site. Installation and site-specific works are designed as/in spaces that produce for an audience an experience, one which generates questions and provocations for contemplation through the experience of inhabiting and moving through the space (Kaye, 2000). Through this event, we aim to produce a new experience for the SOI students and other children, creating create a safe space, albeit temporary, for children and adolescents. The temporary, "tent in the street" event becomes a mode through which the SOI students can share their work produced in this project and stage and encounter with other neighborhood residents.

I identify a small funding grant opportunity from the University of Sheffield that supports public forms of research dissemination. Because the grant requires an application, Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha and I organize a handful of meetings with first the SOI students to outline their ideas for the application and then with the rest of the SOI team members to put together a budget and write the application. In the meeting with the SOI students, Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha and I ask them to outline their visions for the event, including the range of activities they hope to include, where and when they want the event to take place, what items we need, and what we want to learn from this experience. As the children call out their ideas - to schedule the event after Ramadan, to rent a DJ and hold dance competitions, to play games, to read their stories to an audience, to hold painting sessions, to practice their public speaking skills, to motivate themselves and inspire others - I write these on the whiteboard.

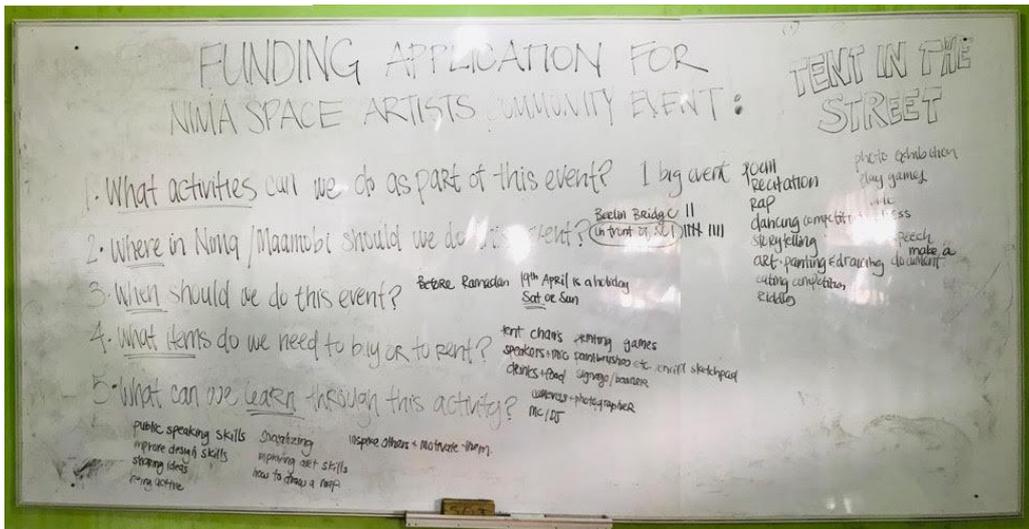


Image 22. Notes from a collaborative planning meeting for the street event (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

Larry, Mustapha, Fatimatu, and I then organize a series of meetings with the other SOI team members, to discuss how to translate the SOI students’ desires into reality, including producing a budget and identifying necessary permissions within the neighborhood. Larry, Mustapha, Fatimatu, and I write the application together, and I submit the application to my university as a collaborative event with Spread-Out Initiative NGO. The application is successful, and we plan the event as a space in which to share the research activities with the public, to engage residents and spectators in conversation about our activities, and to create a children-centered event space in the street. We ensure the safety of this children-centered event by taking necessary precautions to notify and obtain permissions from the local authority, area business owners, street vendors, and police. We rent tents and chairs, we design and hang up banners advertising the event, we set up roadblocks, and we invite area residents, businesses, friends, and family to the program.

We structure the event into two parts: First, a community-wide space in which we introduce the project, set up a photography exhibition of the SOI students’ PhotoVoice stories, and each of the SOI students has the opportunity to read their stories and poems to our audience. This is open to public participation and dialogue and includes community leaders as invited guests and audience members, which opens moments of community conversation and reflection. As such, this event expands beyond a conventional research dissemination exercise and as such, produces valuable insights for reflection on this project. For this moment, we invite all of the Nima elders whom we interviewed, but only one is able to join: Honorable Shareau Tajudeen, former member of parliament for Ayawaso East, whose interview

is included in Chapter 2. In his response to these students' stories at our event, Honorable provides the critical response on the human that sets up the conceptual framework in Chapter 3.



Image 23. Mallam Mutawakil organizes the photo exhibition at the community event (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

For the second part of the event, we hire a DJ to play music, and we re-organize the space into a children-only recreational space, open to all SOI students and all other neighborhood children, where they take part in jump rope competitions, tug-o-war games, singing, and dancing. Whereas the other methods are oriented toward the children recounting their spatial experiences (through their production of arts-based materials and presentations and discussions elicited from these), this event enables that we, from our different positions, produce a shared community space experience. After the event, Fatimatu and I organize small group discussions with the SOI students on their reflections.

Recording and transcription

In each of the workshops, we (Larry, Fati, Mustapha or I) record our activities, including the SOI students' individual presentations, using my iPhone to make voice notes, photos, and video recordings. We also make recordings of our reflective conversations (one of which, as shared in Chapter 3, undergirds the conceptual

framework). I choose this device because of its high quality, and because it is a small, lightweight, and commonplace everyday item that I regularly carry with me. In each instance, before beginning to record, I/we would make it clear to the students before proceeding with a recording. In reviewing these recordings, each is an “emplaced construction” made through the interaction between people, objects, technology, and my own interpretation and prioritization of sounds, noises, visuals; additionally, while each recording captures specific information, there is also always content from the original interaction that is left out (Ellingson, 2017, p. 134). Each recording is a means of documenting, remembering, listening, and noticing the elements captured in the student presentations, from the environment, affect, and conversational dynamics.

To transcribe, I listen to recordings multiple times, looking for underestimated or previously unnoticed aspects of conversations that I miss when the initial presentation took place, such as lapses and silences, interruptions, bodily movements. I reflect on the process, I listen to the content of the words each individual speaks, but I also pay attention to silences and interruptions, as potential instantiations of the power dynamics that inform all of our relationships. This means noticing who speaks and who does not speak, how conflict is negotiated and agreements are reached, dynamics between girls and boys, between older and younger SOI students, and between the SOI students and the facilitators, as well as how the SOI students connect their contributions to their own positionalities. The process informs my understanding of the recorded content and what is shared (Ellingson 2017). Listening and relistening to recordings is also an important means for me to resituate our experiences together, particularly as time passes, to keep them present in and through my thesis writing process.

The process of transcribing the SOI students’ presentations and conversations also introduces me to their ways of relating their information through stories and narratives. The SOI students’ personal narratives, ranging from a couple of sentences to paragraphs of written or transcribed text, describe the multiple, shared, and divergent aspects of their lived experiences in community spaces, concerning play, danger, everyday observations, conflict, and relationships, for example. During our collection of these stories (when we undertake our arts-based research workshops, between January - August 2019), the SOI students relate these narratives via both photographs and captions, written text, visual body maps, and oral presentations, performances, and conversations. During my transcription of these stories, I begin to reflect more and more on how so many of the ways in which the SOI students share their experiences are in a narrative format and the

significance of this form. These sensitivities directly inform our collaborative analysis process and my writing process for this thesis.

Participatory analysis with SOI students

After we complete our arts-based participatory research methods workshops and community event (January-September 2019), Larry, Fati, Mustapha and I agree for my return in four months' time for us to design and conduct a participatory analysis workshop with the SOI students (January-February 2020). In preparation for this return, I complete the transcriptions of our arts-based methods workshops, and I begin desk research on participatory approaches to qualitative research analysis. Ultimately, what we design together and I describe in this section is a collaborative analysis process focused on the information produced by the SOI students through the arts-based methods workshops: PhotoVoice, body mapping, group mapping, and storytelling.

As we prepare this collaborative analysis process, I recognize that the SOI students, SOI team members, and my own knowledge is relative to our positionalities, different points of view, and interests. In line with scholarly research on embodiment, this approach recognizes that each participant is both a tool for inquiry and a vector for knowledge. Our knowledge is embodied, and so in an analysis process, or knowledge is situated in our social positions from which we see the world (Haraway, 1988). Running this analysis as a collaborative process also addresses the convention power dynamics associated with myself, an outsider researcher, along performing the analysis, and thus speaking for (analyzing for) others on their own experiences (Liebenberg, Jamal, & Ikeda, 2015). This approach allows for interpretations from multiple perspectives, particularly the SOI students, in interpreting their own ideas, knowledges, and meanings. Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha, and I position ourselves as facilitators of this process.

Through this collaborative approach, we attempt to make space for multiple layers of interpretation - including elucidating the SOI students' points of view. We do this in two ways: By reading and interpreting the participants' stories in ways that do summarize and look for similarities and differences based on what is said, as well as asking questions about power, context, gender, age, ability, etc. that enable us to explore additional issues behind what is said. Further, we acknowledge the capture moments in which during the process, the SOI students agree or disagree (or better said, where our perspectives and experiences come together or go apart) and why.

We define a thematic analysis process, in that we seek to explore the ideas and meanings articulated in the SOI students' ideas and stories and the commonalities of these ideas across the SOI students' lived experiences, in order to critically examine the context, identities, and larger societal discourses called into question through SOI students' stories. This workshop is oriented to discuss with the SOI students from their own perspectives the themes, patterns, and ideas that they see as emerging from the information we generate together in this project, which is grounded in their everyday experiences. It was important to Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha and me that we conduct our analysis in a way that enabled the SOI students, who are 10-17 years old, to effectively understand and participate in the entire process. To do this, we draw on two models of collaborative analysis that are designed for researching and analyzing with children (Liebenberg, Jamal, & Ikeda, 2015; Kurtz, 2014).

Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha and I begin by acknowledging that this kind of rigorous analysis was new to all of us, despite all of our previous engagements with research projects. During my five-week visit for this process, we use the first two weeks to re-familiarize ourselves with the SOI students' materials and transcripts and to plan and prepare the structure for the analysis workshops. I also identify YouTube videos on qualitative analysis and thematic analysis for us to watch and discuss together:

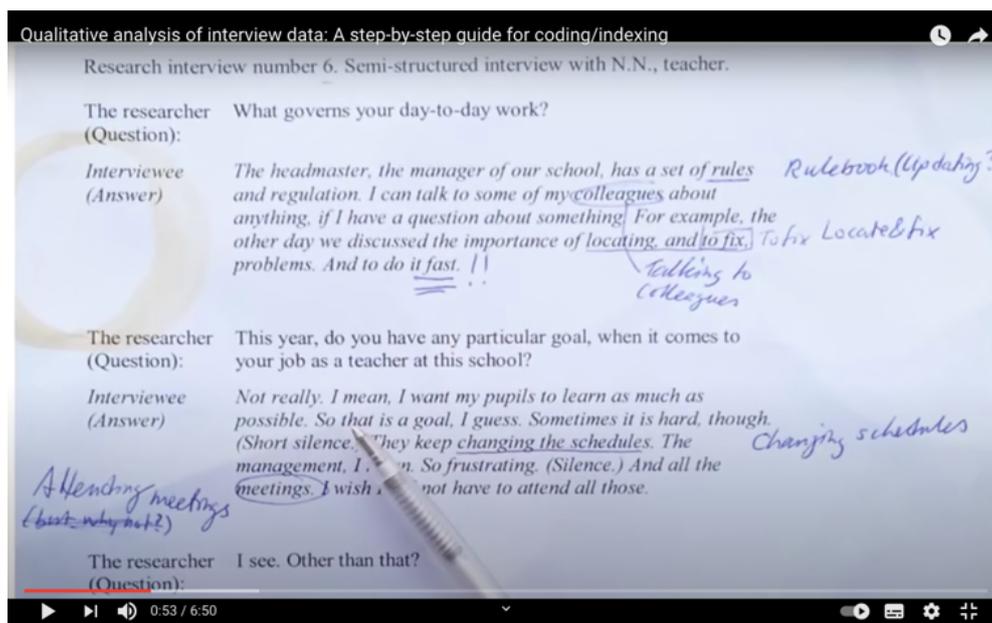


Image 24. Labeling codes in an interview transcript (Source: Löfgren 2013)

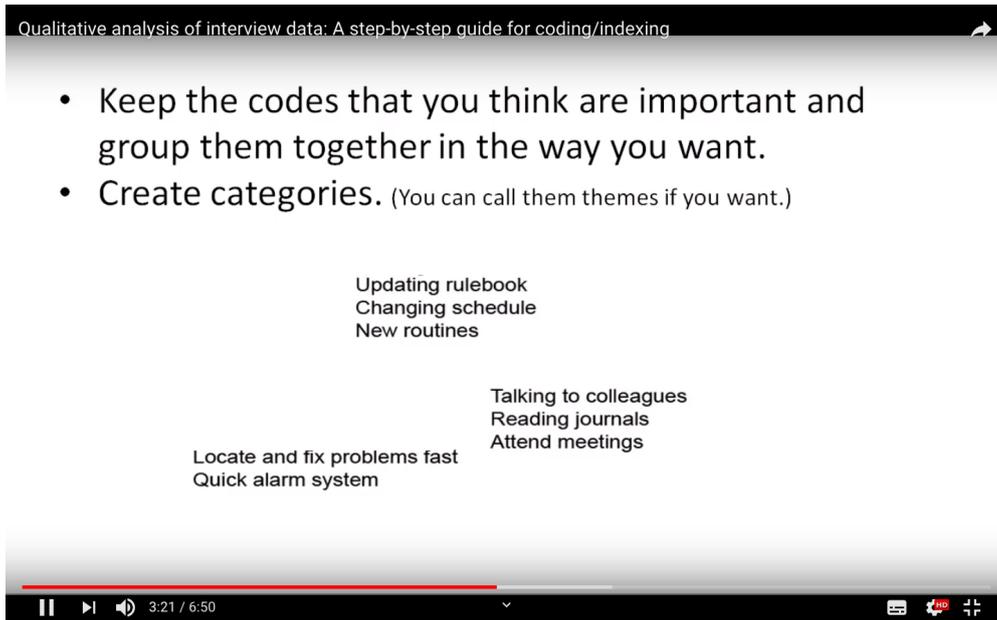


Image 25. Organizing codes into categories (Source: Løfgren 2013)

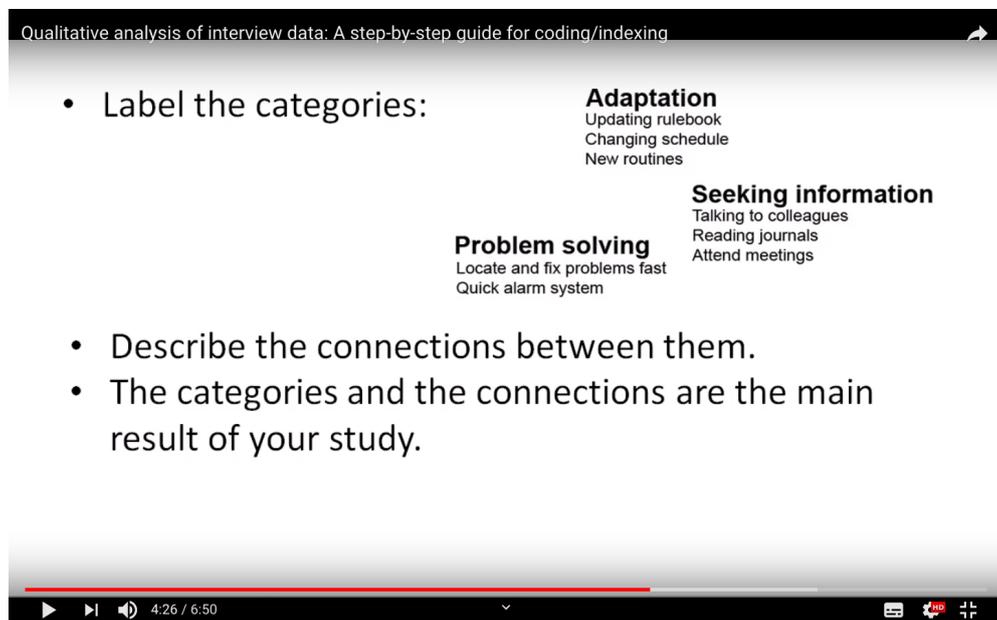


Image 26. Labeling and connecting categories (Source: Løfgren 2013)

I print hard copies of the step-by-step guide on youth participatory analysis, which is tailored to working with indigenous youth in Canada (Liebenberg, Jamal, & Ikeda, 2015). We use this clear and accessible guide as we build our own process.

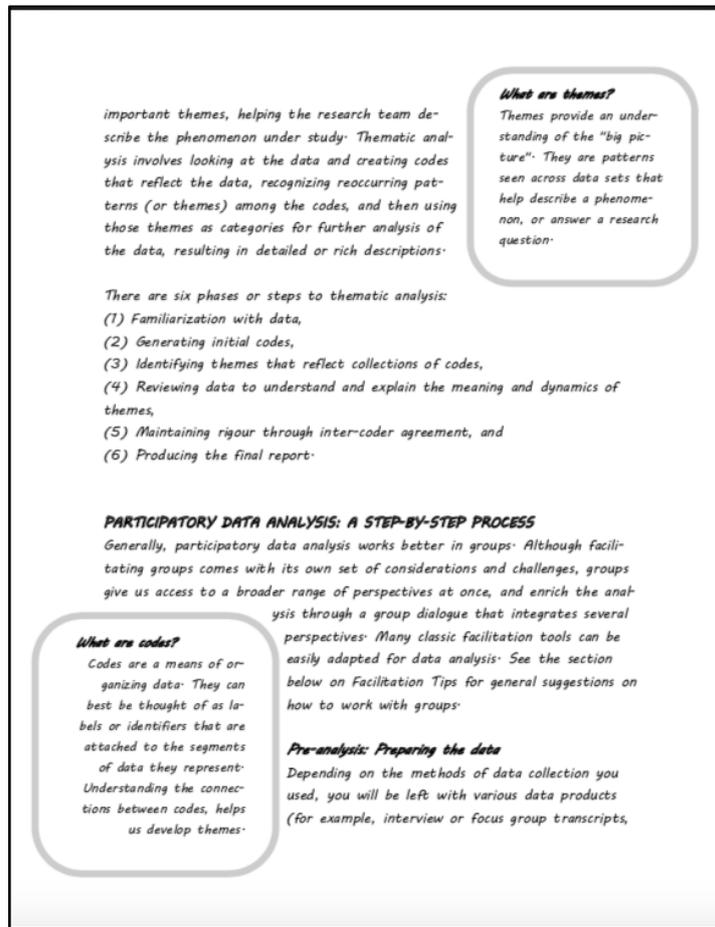


Image 27. Leibenberg et al's (2015) step-by-step process overview for participatory thematic analysis



Image 28. Developing codes that reflect themes (Source: Leibenberg et al, 2015)

I print each student's transcribed contributions from our four arts-based workshops (PhotoVoice, body mapping, group mapping, and storytelling). We present each SOI student with their transcribed contributions from their participation in the four workshops as a single-sided, stapled set of papers (between 3 to 8 single-sided pages, size 15 Calibri font). We ask each student to take the time to read their stories, and to make any edits, subtractions, or additions that they would like to represent their ideas and stories accurately. Each student has one to two weeks to review their stories, writing any corrections or additions between text, on the blank side of the paper, or in the margins. This allows each student to review their contributions to refresh their memory; it also provides them the space and opportunity to reflect on what they said, how their ideas have represented, and if they choose, to represent it differently, with new or additional details, to add in a new content, or to remove ideas or stories altogether if they no longer wanted it as part of our research.

We design the workshop in two parts, and we aim to work with the SOI students in two separate groups: first with the older students in a two-day process (who had one week to review their stories), then with the younger students following the same

two-day process (who had an extra week to review their stories). In planning these sessions, however, we also take into account the SOI students' own schedules around their family, community, school, and religious commitments. We inform the first group (generally, the older SOI students) well in advance, but then some of the older students are not able to attend, while some younger students also unexpectedly show up. So, we adjust to their availabilities, which shapes the constitution of the two groups as follows:

Table 3. Groups for collaborative analysis workshop

ANALYSIS WORKSHOP #1		ANALYSIS WORKSHOP #2	
Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Nusrat (16 years)	Usman (15 years)	Hiba (15 years)	Tanko (14 years)
Fati (15 years)	Sulley (14 years)	Mariam (13 years)	Jordan (14 years)
	Abdallah (14 years)	Abigail (12 years)	Joshua (13 years)
	Abdul Majeed (14 years)	Widad (10 years)	Sheik (13 years)
	Emmanuel (11 years)		

Mustapha is also unavailable at this part of the process, so Larry, Fatimatu, and I plan and facilitate the two workshops. We use the same process for both workshop groups, and the three of us work with each group on a single weekend (Saturday and Sunday), so that our activities and their ideas remained fresh in their minds. The experience is productive, demanding, effective, and tiring.

We begin the workshop with a discussion about our objectives with this research as participatory research, a reminder of the activities we have completed together since the beginning, and we emphasize that they all bring different knowledges that were unique and valuable, that sometimes they will have shared experiences, and sometimes distinct experiences. Then we divide the large workshop group into the three smaller subgroups. There is a facilitator (Larry, Fati, or me) with each subgroup of two or three SOI students. For example, in the first workshop, I work with two SOI students (15F, 11M), Fati works with two SOI students (16F, 14M), and Larry works with three students (14M, 14M, 14M).

The aim of Day 1 is for the SOI students to work in small groups to discuss their ideas from our workshops together, to review in small groups their ideas from their transcripts, and to produce a long list of all of their ideas (“codes”) that they would represent on a group poster. First, each facilitator leads a small group discussion where each SOI student presents to the other small group members and facilitator his/her ideas and stories from his/her own transcript. After all of the SOI students present their ideas, the facilitator leads a small group conversation about the different stories that emerge, which points are shared, which are different and why. In this moment, Fati, Larry, and my role is to facilitate the conversation and to take copious notes on all the different ideas that the SOI students mention. Then we ask each group to produce their own “ideas poster” with all of the ideas and stories they'd discussed, representing and summarizing these different ideas in short phrases or sentences (for example, “lungus are smelly,” “kidnapping in lungus,” “adults sack kids,” or “SOI is my base”). Then each subgroup presents their poster to the other subgroups, and we hold a large group discussion about the similarities and differences that emerge between the groups, as well as a reflective discussion on issues of power and gender that emerge across their different ideas and posters.

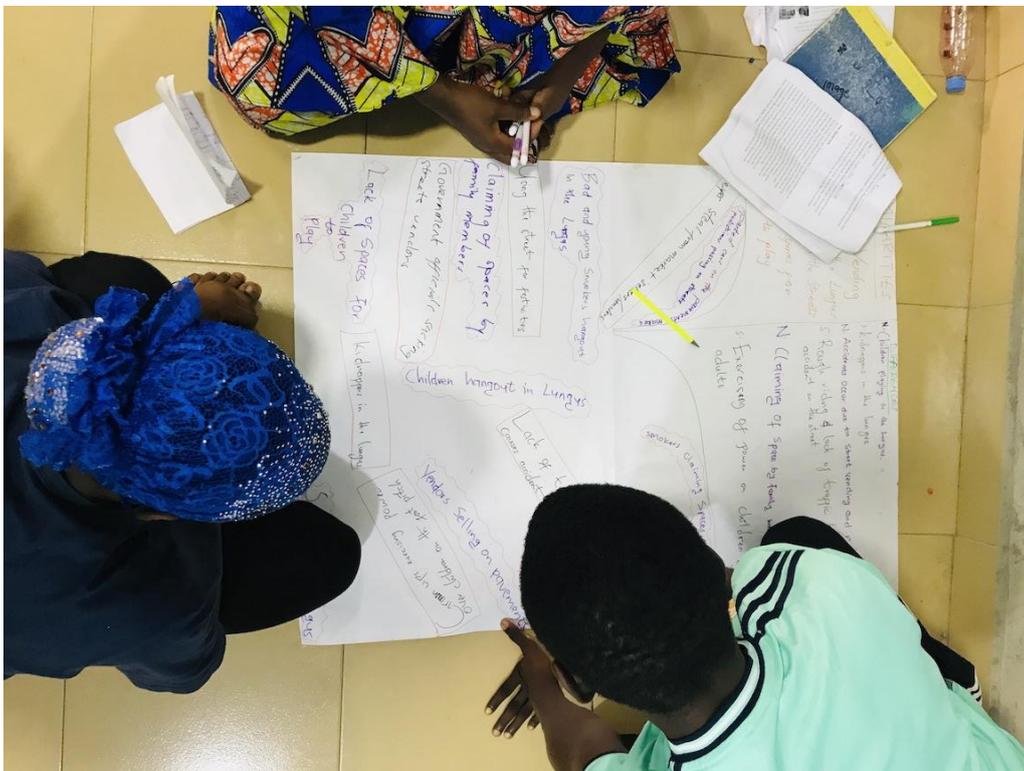


Image 29. Two SOI students, working with Fatimatu, produce their poster of ideas (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

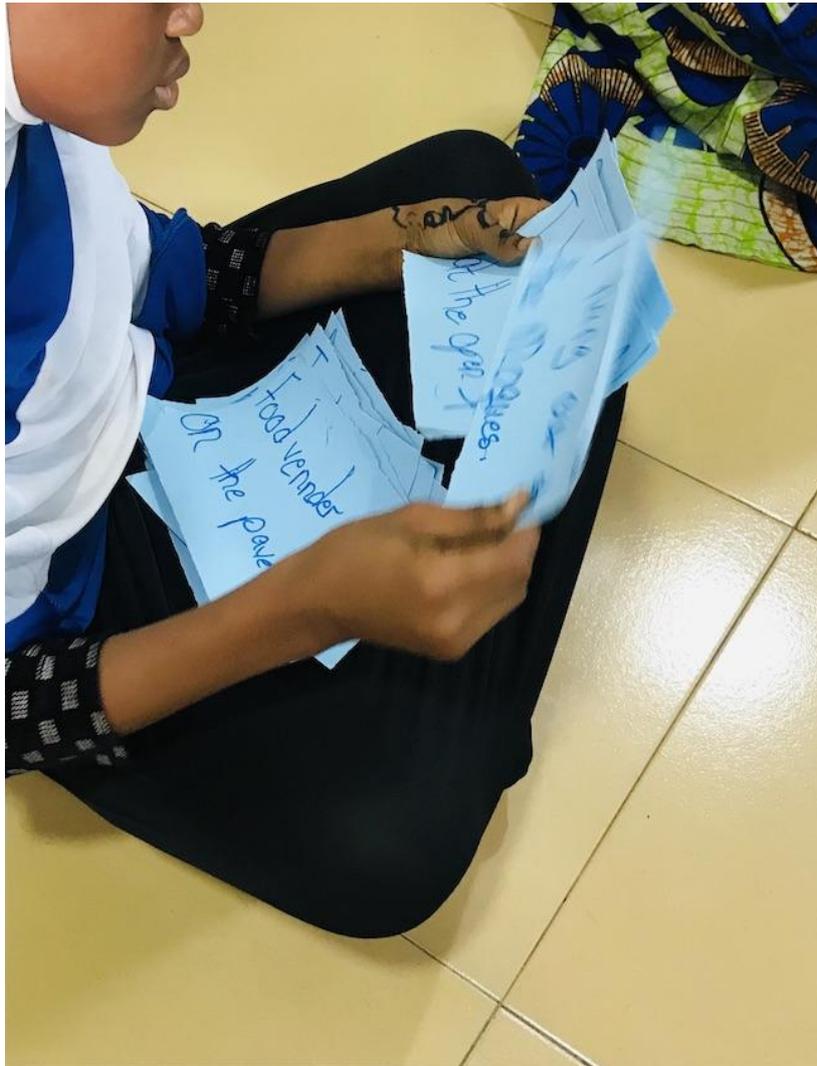


Image 31. SOI student reads through her idea cards (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

The aim of Day 2 is to work in the large group to organize the individual codes into categories and to identify themes explaining these categories. We facilitate two activities to do this. First, Larry and Fati facilitate a card sorting game. Each group begins with their own cards divide among them equally. We ask each SOI student to rank their cards, placing the most important at the top of their deck of cards and the least important at the bottom. Then each SOI student, one by one, puts down his/her card. In the first workshop, we have seven participants, so in the first round, they put down seven cards. We all view the seven cards laid down and ask the SOI students to decide how to group them together. We discuss which card goes with which, and why, facilitating an interactive discussion and sorting process. Here we notice how the SOI students negotiate this process; sometimes SOI students agree, sometimes others disagree, sometimes one student tries to push their idea of a grouping onto others or tries to negate another's ideas. We the facilitators ask

questions such as “Do you agree with this grouping?” or “Why this group of cards together?” or “If you agree, why?” or “If you don't agree, why?” We remind the students that at the end, they can also make changes to these groups of cards as they see fit.



Image 32. SOI students sort their cards into themes (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

After several rounds, we finish putting down all the cards, and we review them with the SOI students. Some categories of cards were quite sizeable (15-20 cards), and in such instances, we ask them to look into subdivide these categories further, if possible.

In the final activity, we the facilitators ask the SOI students to look at the groupings of cards they have sorted (“categories”) and to attribute an overarching idea or story that holds them together (“theme”). To do this, we bring out large-sized pieces of white paper (A0 size), with one sheet of paper for each group of cards. We ask the SOI students to look at the groupings again and discuss how their ideas fit together into categories. This is the particularly difficult time of the process, as it is at this moment that all of our energies begin to flag and some of the SOI students become distracted and restless. However, this process is valuable; seeing their cards organized on these posters and how they laid out the themes, we see some overlaps - sometimes the SOI students would choose to re-arrange their idea cards, to adjust a theme, to again negotiate why one card was in one place and not another.



Image 33. SOI students work together to paste their agreed group of ideas (codes) organized into a category onto white paper and assign a theme (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

After establishing agreement on the idea cards organized together on the large paper, we asked the SOI students to work together to produce a single descriptive label (theme) that captured all of the ideas, and a supporting sentence to explain clearly their ideas for each theme. The end result is a theme poster, which includes the theme title at the top, the series of colored idea cards categorized together, and a descriptive sentence explaining the theme in the SOI students' own words. The SOI students work together on this in small groups and present to one another to solidify group agreement.

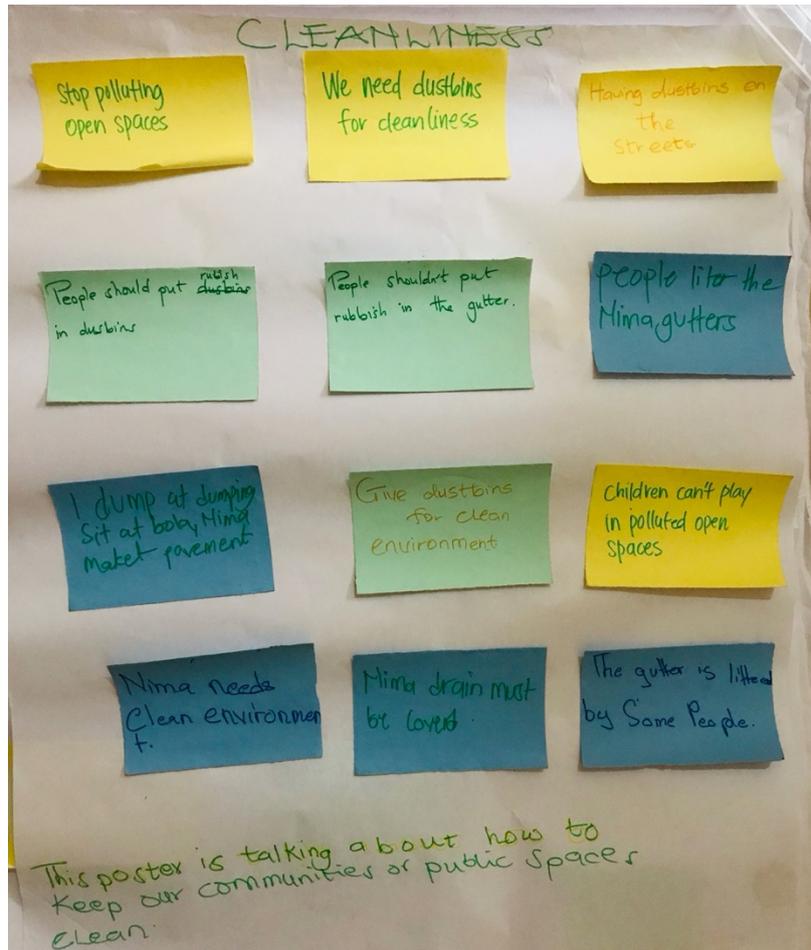


Image 34. Theme poster on "Cleanliness" produced by SOI students in the second analysis workshop group (Photo by Victoria)

In the first workshop, the SOI students produce 10 themes (10 theme posters). In the second workshop, the SOI students produce 20 themes (20 theme posters). The following table illustrates the full list of themes and descriptions that the SOI students produced across our two workshops.

Table 4. Themes produced through collaborative and participatory analysis process

WORKSHOP #1: 10 THEMES WITH DESCRIPTIONS	
THEMES	DESCRIPTIONS
Nimanians View of Nima	Our positive perception of Nima
Personal Experience in Nima	Using Nima spaces for personal activities
Personal Spots in Nima	Where we spend our leisure time

Adults Overpowering Young Ones	The child has less power when it comes to using public spaces
Vending Problems and Solutions	How government should solve vending problems in Nima
Dangers and Crimes in Nima	Negative effects of living in Nima
Causing Road Accidents	Situations causing road accidents
Solutions to Road Accidents	Activities to take to prevent road accidents
Act of Renovation	Things to do for more open spaces in Nima and healthy and comfortable living
Future Nima	How Nima spaces should be used for a better future

WORKSHOP #2: 16 THEMES WITH DESCRIPTIONS

THEMES	DESCRIPTIONS
Cleanliness	This poster is talking about how to keep our communities or public space clean
Lungu has no owner	We must give some space in the lungu to others who have the important things to do
What I want to become	Just as I said I will be a footballer, that is what I will like to be
Recreational places	We use some open spaces for recreational places like mosque, library, and football pitch
Violence	We need to avoid fights in our community
Activities happening on an open space	People use the open space to sell things
Activities that happen on the public space	Some of the activities such as games, festival, etc and important things on our environment
The way we use the lungus and the park	Some of us use the lungus for shortcut and for playing. Some also play football in the lungu and in the park
The use of the pavement to sell things	How people use the pavement to sell things and their purposes

What we need in our community	We need zoo, parks, and playing ground because some of children have not been there before. And we also need a library for the students to be educated for their studies
Street lights in lungus	There must be street lights so that negative activities cannot happen easily or people can see whether someone is there or not
Smoking in the lungus	When the smokers smoke, they become high, which makes them engage in criminal activities like stealing
Some of the effects of smoking	When you pass in the lungus when they are smoking will just blow the air of the smoke and you can inhale it and it will affect your health
Dangerous activities on the street	It may cause accidents and can kill people as well
Road accidents	Accidents occur in how they ride the motorbikes roughly. It causes accidents some can get seriously injured
Safety on the road	Ways of preventing accidents in our community
Kidnapping in the lungus	Your mother can send you, the person can trace your footsteps in the lungu, and nobody is there. The person can rape you or use you for money rituals
Safety watch in our community	These are things we must do so that accident will not occur. We look left, right, and left again before you cross the road
How to use the streets	These are things we must do so that accidents will not occur
People don't normally pass in the lungus	Some of us don't like passing in the lungus because of the negative activities that happens in the lungus

I use these themes and codes generated through our collaborative analysis process as the interpretation of our research learnings (findings). In the following chapter, I put these themes and codes in conversation with academic scholarship to theorize from our research process.

Thesis writing

Informed by the work of these students, and the ways in which they share their lived experiences, observations, and analyses in the form of narratives and stories, I write and structure this thesis so as to represent the co-construction of material, visual, textual, and verbalized narratives of children's embodied experiences. In order to do this, I embrace a writing practice that attends to knowing as corporeal, because, after all, "our perspectives are rooted in our bodies -- and as a result of the writing process -- when we write, we join with other discourses, people, and objects to mutually construct the bodies of ourselves and others" (Ellingson, 2017, pp. 171–172).

I enact this practice in several ways. I write in the first person as practice of "writing personally" (Pease, 2012, p. 77): I place myself within this text, I locate myself in the subjective position as writer-doctoral researcher-collaborator, I acknowledge my situated knowledge. This embodied "I" writing also allows me to articulate the research process as it is, a thinking-feeling experience of learning and collaboratively producing knowledge, and feeling the tensions within this experience, where past moments are rendered present in the writing process, hence my dominant use of the present tense in this thesis.

I also approach this thesis itself as a site of conversation and dialogue. I do this firstly in order to recognize and retain the interactive and relational means of working and thinking that has constituted our research process. Each step of our research is grounded in interactions, and I write of this thesis as an extension of the in-person interactions and encounters: with Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha, the SOI students, Nima elders, and all those we interact with through our activities. The space of the pages of this thesis emerges as further sites of encounter between me and others (for example, with Larry and Mustapha who read and comment on chapters of this thesis). As such, I represent critical elements of this thesis as conversations and dialogues, particularly the conversations with Nima elders (Chapter 2) and elements of the conceptual framework (Chapter 3). Further, following along the writing practices of Black and African feminists, I write this thesis in a deliberate narrative style that finds ways to bring in the voices and words of the multiple individuals who participate in, collaborative with, and contribute to this thesis and share intimate and personal and hopeful details from their lives and worlds (Hartman, 2007, 2019; Amoah, 1997). This for me is a practice of remaining in conversation with these individuals, their words, contributions, and perspectives, which I share alongside my own.

I center in this thesis the stories, conversations, and dialogues that so deeply inform the conceptual framing and theorizing within this research. In the following chapter in which I share the learnings from the arts-based workshops and site-specific intervention with the SOI students, I structure the chapter with a selection of four speculative narratives. I re-present the students' narratives - their own expressed visions of possible futures with regards to their community space experiences - in relation with the themes and codes generated from our analysis process. To do this, I organize the following chapter into five parts: In the first four parts, I work with a selection of stories produced by the SOI students in the storytelling workshop and relevant themes that I match to these stories as part of my further analysis in the thesis writing process, following by the fifth part focused on discussion. The first four parts are each comprised of the self-introduction(s) of the SOI student(s), the story they produced, and a series of subsections using the above themes and their codes. I relate the connections between the story and the themes, and I discuss and flesh out the ideas that the SOI students organized for the theme. This for me is a process of bringing in the ideas the SOI students produced across their transcripts, which they associate as codes, and reflect on their individual experiences and across their experiences to write a rich narrative that presents these learnings while also foregrounding the SOI students' voices, contributions, and analytical thinking which is central to this research project. Further, in drawing on the conceptual framework, I read these themes as assemblages (Weheliye, 2014) through which I trace the children's experiences of community space.

Finally, in writing this thesis, I am always navigating the structures of the westernized academy - an (in)tangible space largely composed of bricks, mortar, western canons, and knowledge dissemination conventions as starting points for understanding the world (Christian, 2020; Abdi, 2018; Ahmed, 2017; Noxolo, 2009). I recognize the pages of this thesis as sites of criticism, both in shaping theory and also in writing against the confines of academic conventions. The spaces of scholarly publications are also comprised of academic conventions and practices that have historically excluded (and in many cases, continue to exclude) the onto-epistemological knowledges of my ancestors and other colonized and formerly colonized subjects who comprise the global majority (Ohito, 2019). As such, writing in a conversational mode, centering these dialogues, words, perspectives, and stories in such a way that I remain in dialogue *through* the writing, is my own practice of making space for these voices and for myself in the academy, through this thesis.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have laid out our methodological process for this research project. I demonstrate the connection between the Black feminist epistemological approach that I presented in the previous chapter to the use of research methods that explore SOI students' situated knowledges and creative self-expression. Given the research objective to open new spaces of knowledge production, I illustrate how this methodological approach, which uses collaboratively produced arts-based participatory methods and a site-specific event, allows the SOI students to relay their embodied knowledge concerning their community space experiences. I demonstrate in this chapter how we (Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha and I) take on various roles in the design and facilitation of these methods, from planning to executing to reflecting on our methods, and including our working with the SOI students to produce the community street event as a site-specific intervention. I define the importance of this event, as a space and time for sharing our research learnings within the Nima neighborhood, addressing issues that emerge from the research process, and opening up new spaces for dialogue within the community in Nima. In turn, I devote space to describe our experimental building of a participatory analysis that centers the SOI students' participation in assembling together new meanings from our research process. This chapter sets up the construction of our thematic analysis, which I draw on in the next chapter as I focus on a selection of the SOI students' stories. I put their stories in relation with the themes and codes from our wider collaborative analysis to forefront their voices and meanings as I demonstrate how the children's experiences emerge from assemblages of community space.

Children's narratives of Nima community spaces

In this chapter, I employ a relational approach to foreground the ways in which the SOI students, as Black subjects, share their lived experiences and through their narratives describe how community spaces in Nima are assembled. I use the Spread-Out Initiative (SOI) NGO students' own speculative stories and analysis themes, which direct us to look at the manifold and deeply entangled ways through which their lived experiences of community space are made. To do this, I structure this chapter into five parts, with the first four parts oriented around a story authored by SOI students and the related themes produced by the SOI students in our analysis workshops, followed by the fifth part focused on discussion that relates these learnings to the conceptual framework.

In Part 1, I focus on waste, which I explore through Usman, Tanko, and Emmanuel's short stories of the Nima drain and the SOI students' themes on these uncompleted sanitation infrastructures, a lack of care by government officials and residents in the provision of services, but also the practices of relational care enacted by these children imagining a specific, and seemingly simple, community space improvement. In the Part 2, Abdul Majeed's story of young boys' football play in the lungu relates the myriad ways the SOI students get kicked out from space, navigate adult power, find, and make space for play. In the Part 3, I focus on road accidents, reading Mariam's story of a young boy's accident while crossing the street with the SOI students' themes on dangerous activities in the street, and then explore their speculative practices of imagining, mapping, and storytelling safer built environments. In Part 4, I focus on violence, relating Fati and Tanko's story on everyday dangers in the lungus to the SOI students' themes on fighting and kidnapping in the lungus, and their responses: to avoid some of these spaces and imagine more communal practices of safety, like neighborhood watch. I also narrate our collective practice of producing a children's event in the street to create a safe, pleasurable place in which the children play. In foreground their stories and grounding this chapter in the meanings produced from our analysis process, I make their voices visible in analyzing the ways that waste, dispossession, accidents, and violence each assemble and circulate in the Nima neighborhood, shaping in different ways their less-than-human experiences of community space.

I identify and trace these lived realities as four (interconnected) assemblages, which address the research questions of this thesis: attending to how these children articulate their community space experiences (RQ1) and their/our inventive

practices of imagining and producing space otherwise (RQ2). Working through these stories and the related insights from our research workshops, I narrate how the SOI students describe and demonstrate the heterogeneity of bodies, materials, affects, and practices that shape their less-than-human experiences. Their stories demonstrate the diverse but also interconnected dimensions of their everyday existence within precarity, danger, and myriad forms of dispossession as lived, felt, remembered, and anticipated experiences in Nima community spaces. Yet alongside this, the children's stories and their practices also evidence their demands and imaginings for alternative spaces and ways of being.

On this last point, I consider deeply the children's and our inventive practices and methods of inhabiting, recreating, and imagining community spaces otherwise - through their existing everyday practices, through their speculative storytelling, and through our collaboratively produced site-specific intervention. I argue that these inventive and wayward practices and methods are worldmaking Nima community spaces, that is, their "perceiving differently what the[ir] world is or looks like or can be" (Quashie, 2021, p. 8) through their imaginations and embodied performances, which "center Black belonging, Black futurities, and Black children's modes of relating to the more-than-human world" (Nxumalo, 2020a, p. 37). I explore these practices, which are always already embedded in the children's everyday practices of play, and also include others that we devise and produce as part of our collaborative research process: through the children's story writing and our collectively produced site-specific intervention (street occupation) at Oku Street.

Part 1:
“The Drain” by Usman, Tanko, and Emmanuel:
Pollution and intimate practices of cleanliness

***Usman’s self-
introduction***

“Usman was the only name [the parents] of giving to their fourth and last baby boy. He grew up and is now 15 years old. He attends school. He is a proud Muslim. He likes to play video games and is good at art. He is one of a kind.”
(individual writeup, February 2020)

***Tanko’s self-
introduction***

“I am 14 years old, I am in JHS 1 in school. I am a boy (male). I like dancing, football, reading, learning. I also have the skill to draw, the skill to play football, I have the skill to dance, etc. I have a tribal mark on my face which shows who I am and where I am coming from. I am a Muslim.” (individual writeup, February 2020)

***Emmanuel’s self-
introduction***

“I am a male. I am twelve years of age. I am in class six in [school]. I am from the Christian religious family. I like reading and like to develop good aspects in life.” (individual writeup, February 2020)

“The Drain” By Usman, Tanko, and Emmanuel

Usman: The Nima community is a very popular community in the whole of Ghana and even outside. And it is well known by the filth of the gutters and the smoke from the weed smokers, and the buzzing of the houseflies and the smell from the feces in the gutters. The people of Nima need a renovation of the place, the community, the gutters, especially the drains which we are about to talk about. The drain is a very big-sized hole which water passes through when it rains. But for Nima community, that is not what it is. People use it for their dumping sites. They dump all sorts of rubbish, and they don’t care. That rubbish they dump in the gutter causes harm to them, like flood and spreading of diseases, etc. It is caused by the dumping of the rubbish in the gutters by Nimanians. There is a day when the people of Nima community will realize what you are doing will not benefit us anything but disasters, illness, and death.

There is a solution, one said. His name was Abdallah aka Baba Jallo Tumbingiwa. He was given a solution to the problem Nimanians were suffering from. Baba told the people: “What you are doing makes the Nima community even worse, it doesn’t take the Nima community far. So we have to stand up, pick up your shovels and rakes and wear our boots and enter the

gutter and start cleaning.” Abdallah didn’t stop there: “My people, the gutter we have here is not for the purpose of dumping rubbish but for the purpose of draining rainwater.”

They stood quietly. “Let’s engage! We will clean the gutter,” said Jordan a.k.a Mr. Skeleton. The people of Nima didn’t hesitate so they started cleaning. Right from the years, days, weeks, months after that the Nima community was popular again but was known for their cleaning, because cleanliness is next to Godliness.

Tanko: The Nima drain is large and it is far away from the beginning of the gutter, and when children are playing beside the drain, some of them fall inside. And those who sell on the pavement, they don’t let the people walk on the streets. They block the way that people will pass. So it causes accidents. The street vendors are selling on the pavement, beside the drain, so people cannot pass there. So I would like the assemblyman to come and cover the drain so that the sellers who sell on the pavement will come on the drain so that people will walk on the pavements.

Emmanuel: And Emmanuel shouted, “Let’s cover the drain and make it as a walkway, then let’s make a market park for the street vendors to sell on.” So the work started. People were holding long brooms to sweep the dust and the sand. During the work, they used dustbins and shovels to clean the dirt. They wanted to put tiles to enhance the community. They fixed pavement tiles so the place will be used for a walkway. So the assemblyman donated cement and sand to put the pavement tiles and paid the water bills to mix the cement with the water. They used the machines that are used for mixing cement and water. Dr. Mustapha also gave us a huge amount of money to contribute. So now Nima is a very beautiful area and there is no feces in the drains, and the food vendors come back on the drain so people pass on the pavement, so now no accidents and no feces in the gutters.

Usman, Tanko, and Emmanuel direct our attention to the uncompleted Nima drain and open gutters in their production of speculative fictions about Nima community space. They present these uncompleted essential infrastructures as uncovered sites of human waste and discard, and they mark out conditions which define their lived experiences of community space, along with an urban discourse that paints their neighborhood as “well known by the filth of the gutters.” Through their stories, they position the drain and gutter as material, social, political, and affective sites which residents use and, each boy speculates, might remake as part of their everyday community space experiences. In this Part 1, I draw connections between their

three short stories and the SOI students' analytical theme of cleanliness "talking about how to keep [their] communities or public spaces clean" (SOI students, analysis workshop, February 2, 2020). I concentrate on the assemblage of waste, littering, and pollution, which circulates and is circulated through and around Nima drain and gutters, government neglect, and residents' practices. I use this as mode thinking through the ways these children's dehumanized subjectivity is bound up with diverse objects, bodily experiences, affects, and statements that shape their environmental precarity within Nima community space. In their everyday movements through their neighborhood, they navigate polluted community spaces, they fear falling into these spaces and these prevalent sites of environmental harm and bodily injury. This landscape of precarity is also what situates their mundane acts of cleanliness, also enacted, everyday practices that punctuate our research process, and through our work together, they speculate stories and maps imagining Black futurities of clean community spaces to walk in as part of their environment. Within their limited capacities as children and recognizing their inability to directly challenge these structures and discourses from which their environmental precarity emerges, I explore their practices that enable their coming together, acting otherwise, which provide means of enduring and ultimately, thinking alternatively about this spatial landscape.

"Nima drain must be covered"

The SOI students assert that the "Nima drain must be covered" (analysis workshop, February 2, 2021), a statement and desire that they situate within their theme of cleanliness. The semi-completed Nima drain and gutter is part of a city-wide sanitation infrastructure system designed to channel water from across multiple neighboring areas surrounding Nima southward to the Odaw River and then the Atlantic Ocean. Unlike the completed portion of the infrastructure network in the high-end Cantonments and middle-class Kanda neighborhoods, the 925-meter long drain and 1.43-kilometer gutter running through Nima remain uncompleted. The drain provides the main pedestrian passageway between the Kanda Highway (Nima neighborhood's eastern boundary), and the Nima Highway. At the Nima Highway, the drain becomes a long, uncovered gutter, which runs alongside Oku Street, another major neighborhood road. The drain and gutter are prominent material features of Nima's landscape and conspicuously define the neighborhood.

This semi-completed infrastructure was designed to improve upon residents' previous conditions, which were an unlined stream embankment and network of residents' own self-built and organized gutters and drains put in place to carry stormwater, wastewater, and discarded refuse through their neighborhood (Melara

Arguello et al., 2013). In 2017, the project stalled due to funding shortages, part of a pattern of government authorities' limited financial capacity for urban infrastructure and to disincentivize urban migration to an already resource-constrained neighborhood (Pieterse, 2011). The result of the stalled project is the wide and deep infrastructural absences in the form of open, semi-completed infrastructures that produce environmental hazards, bodily dangers, and injury.

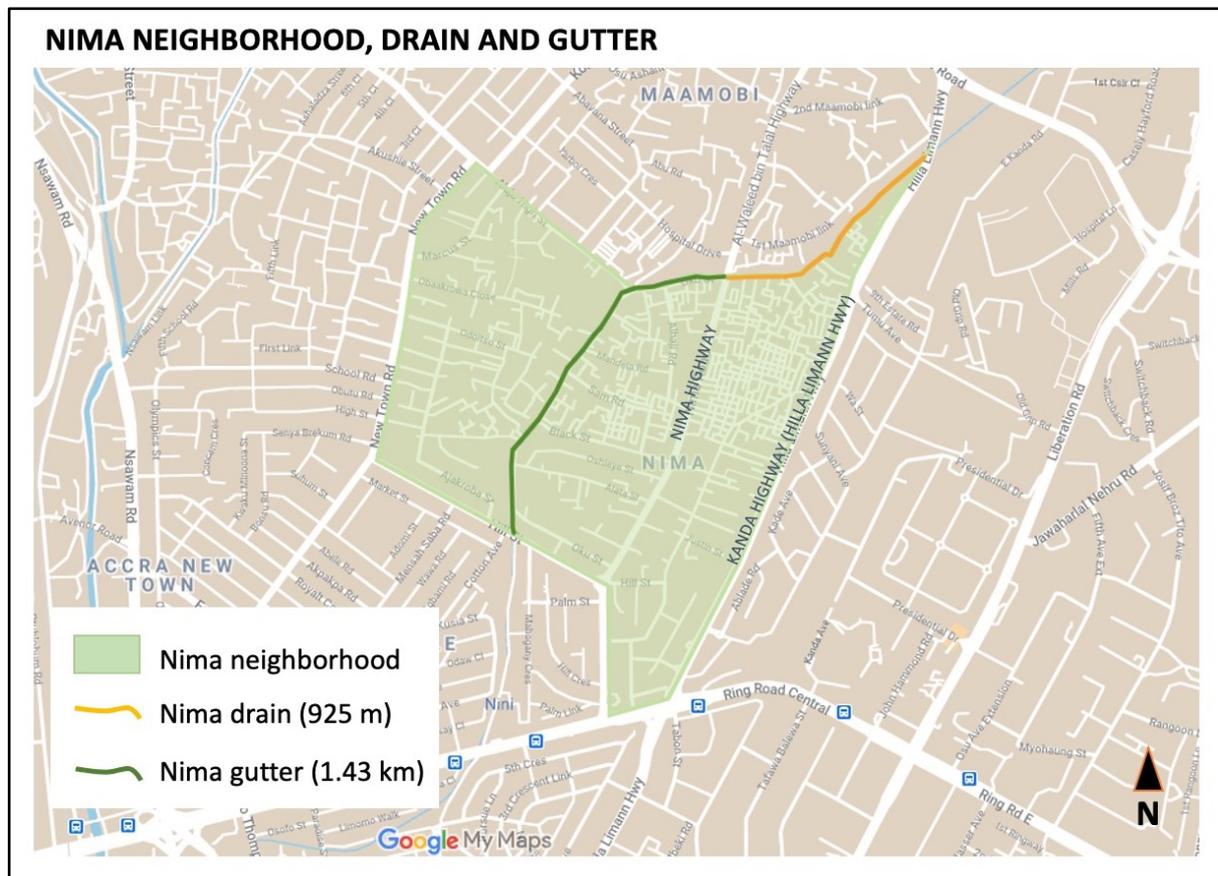


Figure 4. Map of Nima neighborhood, drain, and gutter (Base map source: Google Maps; illustration by Victoria Okoye)

Usman describes the Nima drain as “a very big-sized hole which water passes through when it rains.” On either side of the Nima drain are large, deep trenches, dug as part of the infrastructural project, like extended, gaping holes that disconnect the land, houses, and buildings from the wide, cemented pedestrian walkway formed by the top of the drain. These holes remain from the uncompleted construction process and have expanded due to continuing soil erosion (Ansah, 2018). These holes are perilous, but also perennially susceptible to residents' own practices of filling in the space for their own needs, like makeshift waste dump sites and herding spaces for cattle.

The connected Nima gutter is deep, wide, and open, a cement canyon and runs directly in front of the SOI office. At either side of the gutter is a short stretch of pavement. On one side, residents inhabit the small pavement that juts up against Oku Street, with their activities of making, selling, and storing, from selling roasted plantain and corn, to selling phone credit, to mixing and storing cement blocks, to holding cows in small pens. On the other side of the gutter, the pavement is used as a walkway next to the row of provision shops, offices, and stores that preface the compound residences behind. Mustapha and Larry inform me that with the exception of Berlin Bridge (a t-shaped street intersection), it is residents who invest their own finances, materials, and labor to construct the few existing cement pedestrian bridges for people to pass over the gutter from one side to the other (reflective diary, February 26, 2019).

On Saturdays, Usman walks on the Nima drain to and from his school where he studies the Koran. "It's uncompleted, so I think it's a dangerous place because there are holes at the sides," he says. "Whilst you're walking, maybe you can't see the holes and you might fall inside." The large Nima drain and gutter, in their states of incompleteness, exist as ever-ready threats of physical injury that the children relate to remembered and potential harms. Tanko points out, both in his part of the story and in the group mapping process, that children walking along the Nima drain and gutter do fall inside. At one point, he asks earnestly: "Do you know Nima, zongo children, they can push someone inside the gutter?" Some of the other SOI students, crowded around the group map, laugh in response. They themselves fall or could be pushed into the drain and gutters, as well as their siblings and their friends. These falls and pushes, which are intimate, personal, for some comical, inform a corporeal knowledge and awareness of the gutter and drain's depths and potential as a site for both accidental and deliberate injuries.

On the day of our body mapping workshop, thirteen-year-old Hiba arrives late and with a bandage on her forehead. "Today, when I was coming, I fell in a gutter in the lungu behind our house," she says. "I used to pass in the lungus for shortcut, but today onwards, I won't pass there again because I'm afraid I might get hurt again." Her statement weaves together the material gutter, that moment of falling in the gutter, the resultant corporeal injury, the taped cotton bandage at her forehead, and her own shift from a feeling of comfort with the space to feeling of fear. This, and as she now bears this injury of past hurt that also portends of the potential for future hurts, makes her deeply aware of this space and its potential for hurt. Her intention to not "pass there again" expresses her orientating her body away from the lungu, a way of bringing the lungu and its potential to hurt to the foreground of her attention

so as to orient herself away from it (Ahmed 2006). In the same workshop, 15-year-old Mariam says, “I feel the pavement is dangerous,” recounting her younger sister’s fall in the gutter on their morning walk to school one day. These experiences and firsthand observations of injuries from the uncompleted infrastructures of the drain and gutters become intimate ways in which the children are affected by these urban infrastructures and these infrastructures manifest as risk. The material infrastructures’ potential for injury evokes sensations and feelings of fear, discomfort, and danger in these children. The children communicate how these feelings, produced within this environment, shape their tacit knowledges of the gutter and drain and their neighborhood through these experiences, and how they in turn orient themselves both in their everyday walks to school, to the SOI office, to friend’s houses. They simultaneously navigate this material landscape of uncompleted infrastructures, as well as the “emplaced emotional landscapes through their embodied encounters with place” shaped through these sites of fear (Procter & Hackett, 2017, p. 217).

When Usman, Tanko, Emmanuel and the other SOI students direct our attention to the Nima drain and gutters, they delineate a neglected material infrastructure that positions Nima’s children perpetually as always open to bodily injury and harm. Here I draw on Fati’s framing of neglect to emphasize how these uncompleted infrastructures reify the children’s status as narratively condemned and their embodied experience as less-than-human (Wynter, 2003). Usman introduces Nima as a neighborhood “well known by the filth of the gutters and the smoke from the weed smokers and the buzzing of the houseflies and the smell from the feces in the gutters.” He and the other SOI students invoke this knowledge, and they place their own felt ways of knowing Nima - its filth, gutters, smoke, weed smokers, houseflies, feces - in relation with their own emotional experiences, complicating a stereotypical knowing of their neighborhood. They demonstrate this place where they were born, are growing up, and have come to know as an interconnected and relational space of corporeal, material, affective, social entities (Escobar, 2016). In the next section focused on polluted community space, I share how they also put their lived experiences in relation with neighborhood residents’ - and sometimes their own - everyday practices of polluted community space.

Polluted community space

The uncompleted drain and gutter are a material infrastructure produced through government (in)action and neglect, it is also a gaping hole that residents in turn employ, reconfiguring limited space and spatial resources. The temporal and material incompleteness of this sanitation infrastructure open up opportunities for

residents to transform it, and as Usman, Tanko, and Emmanuel describe in their stories, residents do so in various ways. Yet as these stories demonstrate, these practices also exacerbate children's spatial conditions. Usman narrates how residents employ the drain as a "dumping site," and a lack of care ("they don't care," he says) produces "harm," "flood[ing]," and "spreading of diseases." I concentrate here on the attention the SOI students devote to a shared concern for the littering, pollution, and rubbish dumping in the drain, gutter, and its adjacent community spaces. They frame this as a lack of care, as everyday neglect of neighbors, peers, even themselves in the production of necessary makeshift dump sites of discarded personal and household refuse for the drain and gutter water to, hopefully, wash away.

"Whenever pupils in Nima wash their cloth, they pour the water in the gutter after washing...some of the pupils in Nima put rubbish in the gutter to make it choked," Tanko captions one of his photos in the PhotoVoice workshop. In one of her PhotoVoice stories, 10-year-old Widad captures an image in a lungu, where dark-colored water slowly passes through a shallow open gutter at the side of a building marked with the red "X" of intended demolition by city authorities. Her words and image show us that "the gutter is choked." In her image, we see plastic and other rubbish that stagnate the water's flow.



**Image 35. PhotoVoice image (above) and caption (below) by Widad
“The gutter is choked because they litter in it anyhow.”**

Fifteen-year-old Sulley writes similarly in one of his own PhotoVoice captions: “People in this area pour all dirty things in the gutter and it is too bad.” Yet, these are not only care-less actions by Nima residents, as some SOI students acknowledge that their peers and sometimes they themselves dump in the gutter. For example, 15-year-old Abdallah says, “Because every time you see Nima people, if they are eating, when they are finished, they will just throw the plastic. I also do it, but I’ve repented.” This discard accumulates, transforming community spaces into makeshift dumping sites where the pollution in place deters children from settling in and inhabiting, whether to pass through, for play, or for social activities. Hiba relates this concerning rubbish dumping at the pavement:



Image 36. PhotoVoice image (above) and caption (below) by Hiba

“On the pavement opposite Berlin Bridge, a small place has been polluted with smelly things and everything which I think can be harmful to the community. My experience about this is that other people in my community pollute the open space negatively. Sometimes I get disturbed but I can’t talk because I don’t have any authority. At first I used to play there, but now because is polluted I can’t play there again. People in Nima pollute the open spaces. Youth also use this space for dumping rubbish when raining. Polluting the open space of Nima. That I think should be stopped because it will avoid we the children from playing on the open space.”

In Hiba’s photo, plastic bags, bottles, wrappers, and used hair extensions accumulate with the rubble. Hiba expresses her felt experience of being “disturbed,” and her place in this space is unsettled sensorially through the “smelly things and everything...harmful to the community,” and by the gradual accumulation of materials of rubbish and discard, ostensibly contributed by multiple people, over

time transforming the site where she once would have gathered with friends to play to a dumping ground where now she and other young people “can’t play there again.” She states that others, including those her age and perhaps also older than she, participate in what becomes an established practice that in turn shapes this environment, and her own inability, as one without authority, to directly challenge these practices and the people implementing them.

The SOI students connect these behaviors to structural economic and household realities of hardship in the context of infrastructural and service scarcity. The neglect of their neighborhood materializes not only in the uncompleted drain and gutter, but also through the continued underprovision of waste management services: dustbins, skips, and collection services for the rubbish households do discard. “We want the Parliamentarian to give us a dustbin,” says 11-year-old Abigail in the group mapping workshop. Abigail and others recognize their structured inaccess to dustbins, skips, and regular waste collection, and they situate the possibilities for changing sanitation infrastructure and services with the city authorities who outsource to sanitation contractors in Accra neighborhoods (Awortwi, 2004). In highly dense neighborhoods like Nima, these companies practice a communal container collection approach, where residents dump their waste into communal skips for regular collection; however it is common that these skips are “left unattended to for as long as 2-3 weeks at a time – itself a result in part of companies not getting paid regularly by the local government for pick-up services” (Oteng-Ababio, Melara Arguello, & Gabbay, 2013, p. 99).

Thirteen-year-old Hiba explains further in the group mapping workshop: “I want dustbins, because in our community when it’s raining, you’ll see our mothers and our grandmothers *pooouring* the rubbish in the gutter,” she says. She extends the word, and I imagine these women, who along with children, typically carry the load of managing their household rubbish, bent over, and the long arcs of cloudy and dark liquid *pooouring* from their plastic buckets into the gutter. Hiba continues: “They don’t have money to pay for the dustbins. Because when they send it to the borla [self-organized rubbish collector], he will ask them for money, and they don’t have money. So, I want our MP [Member of Parliament], he should bring dustbins to the community, so we can be pouring our rubbish there.” In Accra, the “the ecological distribution of the city’s waste burden is skewed in favour of the wealthiest districts and residents...perpetuating environmental injustice against and...waste flows towards the poor and vulnerable sections of the city” (Baabereyir, Jewitt, & O’Hara, 2012, p. 322). Working-class neighborhoods like Nima on average generate less waste per head than wealthier neighborhoods but have little or no

waste removal provision and services; additionally, city waste is often managed and disposed of in and *through* these neighborhoods, as the (uncompleted) Nima drain and gutter demonstrate (Baabereyir, Jewitt, & O'Hara, 2012).

The students' stories and our conversations describe their own seen, heard, smelt, remembered experiences of the drain, gutters, waste heaps, their recuperative practices, and associated fears and dangers, part of their everyday experiences of inhabiting what remains in the long interim between stalled construction and whenever the local authorities will next prioritize this neighborhood. Their stories, comments, and insights witness an intimate politics of uncompleted infrastructures, the constant existential threats and sites of physical harm they walk along on their way to school, to buy from street vendors, to see friends. I read in their stories the normalized precarity, danger, structural and interpersonal violences that shape Nima's material environment and the young people's lived and felt experiences within, demonstrating how authorities' sustained failure to address Nima residents' abject environmental exposure "reproduces neo-colonial oppression" (Vasudevan, 2019, p. 3). I therefore read this stalled project as part of a larger cycle of urban neglect and injustice that persists and reproduces the neighborhood as uninhabitable (McKittrick, 2013, Simone, 2019) in the past, present, and foreseeable future.

Here I want to take together the children's experiences of the uncompleted gutter and neighborhood polluting practices, following the rhizomatic trajectories of waste and pollution that flow through, inhabit, and in cases like Hiba's, dispossess children from community space in multiple places and ways, rendering and continually producing community spaces as uninhabitable for these children. Through this sharing of their everyday lived experiences, the children lend insight to how waste passes through the uncompleted drain and gutter, rests in heaps due to the underprovision of dustbins, poor, rubbish collection services, and residents' compelled practices of public dumping and defecating. This waste is intimately connected to, in deep relation with, and affects their own bodies, their material spaces, the atmospheres that surround, and their potential to play. Through their stories and experiences informed by their embodied positions as children, they illustrate their quotidian and necropolitical reality of environmental neglect, health hazard, and danger wrought through government (in)action (Mbembe, 2003) and compounded by residents' practices (and sometimes their own, as Abdallah admits). This demonstrates how the violences of slavery and colonialism live on through environmental precarities that are asymmetrically distributed to those who

continue to be dehumanized in their uninhabitable environments (Nxumalo, 2020a, 2020b).

In our analysis workshops, it is the SOI students who assemble together multiple human and nonhuman elements from which emerge the uncleanliness of community space: the multiple materials in the form of the cement gutter, drain, cement streets and sidewalk pavements, the dirt and pebbled paths of lungus, and discarded rubbish; the practices of littering, dumping household waste in the gutter and drain, and Hiba's curtailed practices of play; their expectation for sufficient waste collection services; their own bodies and those of political leaders, and older youth; their desires and urgencies to cover and complete the gutter and drain and demands for dustbins; the affective atmospheres of fear and danger; and also absences in the form of a missing cover for the drain, and the lack of dustbins in which to deposit their household waste. Taken together, these relational realities, materials, and forces shape their community spaces in particular ways, but also provide the grounds in which they plot both stories and imaginings otherwise (McKittrick, 2013), in this case, activating spaces and practices of cleanliness and care.

"Cleanliness is next to Godliness"

During the group mapping workshop, Hiba, speaking to her and other students' coloring in a series of neighborhood improvements, says: "We need dustbins for cleanliness. For cleanliness is next to Godliness," she says. Then later, in performing his contribution to the story "The Drain" (represented at the beginning of this Part 1), Usman makes the same statement, that "cleanliness is next to Godliness." In a collective process during our group mapping workshop, the children highlight the absence of dustbins and then color in their desired locations for nearly two dozen of them in their neighborhood, strategically locating these in places they walk along and play in every day.

"Here I drew a dustbin at Berlin Bridge. Here is the dustbin, so that we can toss our rubbish here. And I drew another one here at Research Down, we can also toss our rubbish there," says Emmanuel.

"When you are passing by the street, you'll be seeing rubbish around you. If there are dustbins over there, so that maybe when you are walking and you are eating, you just, when you see a dustbin, you just put your thing inside there," Mariam says.

On one hand, this demonstrates the extent of the rubbish that they name and problematize in their neighborhoods, and an indictment of the lack of care by authorities, their neighborhoods, their peers in producing an environment where navigating the drain, the gutter, the litter, and rubbish that extends from these sites into other community spaces, are a daily reality. On another hand, this collective mapping of dustbins in necessary sites throughout their neighborhood is their own operation of modeling a practice of care for their homes, community spaces, and their neighbors that imagine new experiences of living. It is within the very production of Nima neighborhood as an uninhabitable space that these children “form, through practices of care, new human possibilities” (Simone, 2019, p. 23-24).

Their personal and collective attentiveness to cleanliness demonstrates ways in which they operate in relation with and around the uncompleted Nima gutter, the polluted lungus and makeshift rubbish dumps outside the SOI office, but also imagine new relations with these spaces, processes, realities, and politics, which propel “lines of flight, freedom dreams, practices of liberation, and possibilities of other worlds” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 2). Nusrat individually marks out eight dustbins in the collective map, connecting the dustbins to needs, practices, services, placing the dustbins in existing and speculative spaces, saying:

“I place dustbins around because, so that people will not litter again. This one at the drain, because that place is very dirty. And I placed one here, this one, because at the drain to the borla [waste skip] is far. So, if I place only one here, the person from borla could not walk to that place, so I just placed another one here so they can get close... And I placed another dustbin close to the [schoolyard pitch for football and other activities] because they like dirtying there. When they finish playing, they will buy water and drink and just dump it there. But when I put a dustbin here, they will throw the rubbish in the dustbin, so they won't dirty the park, so it will be idyllic for the children. I put another one close to the zoo, too. Because the children at the zoo, so they have to throw their rubbish in the dustbin, not inside the zoo. They will come for it, and they will separate the rubber, they will use the rubber for recycling.”

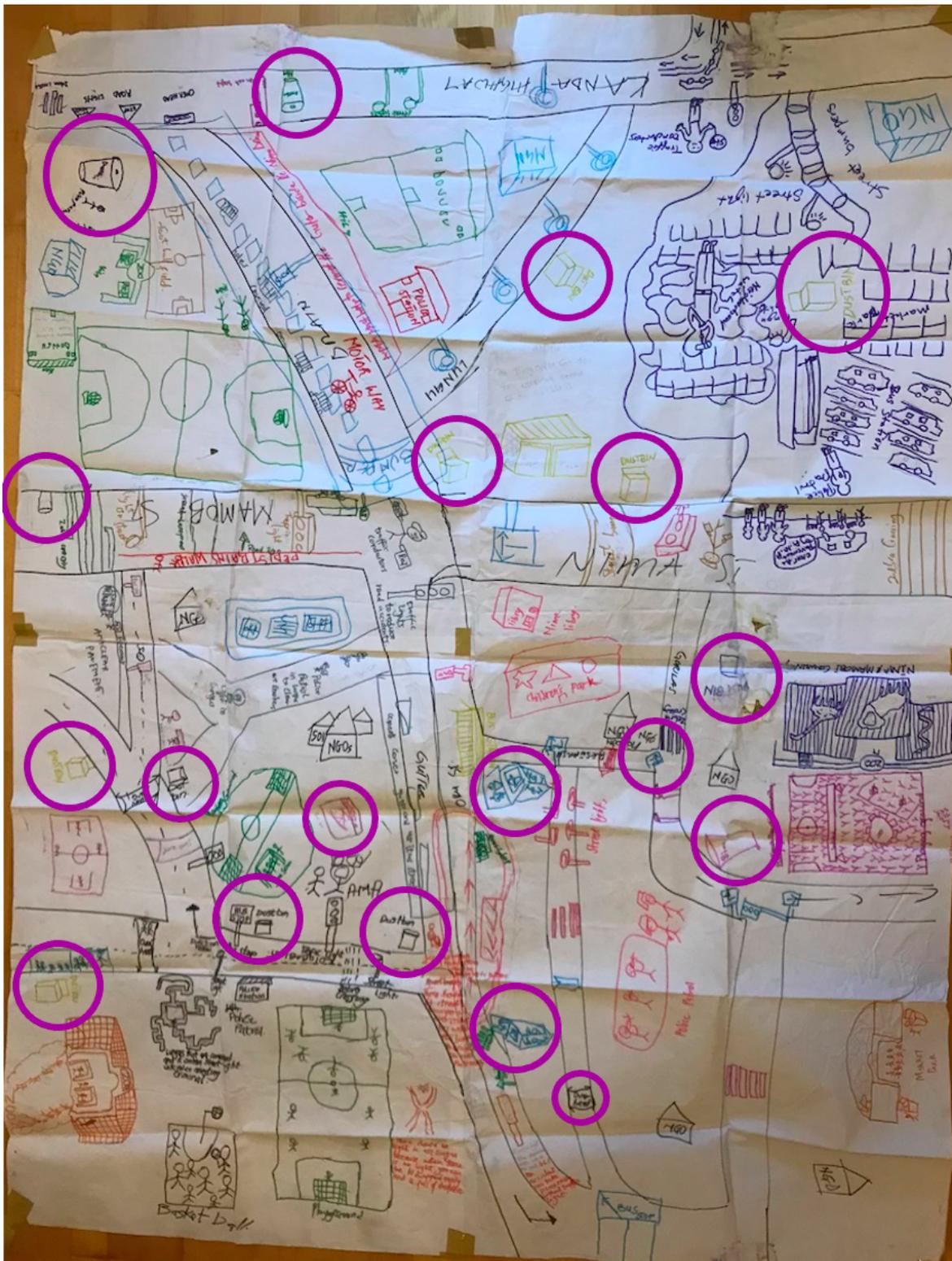


Image 37. Dustbins (indicated in purple) on group spatial map produced by SOI students to imagine improvements to Nima community spaces (Photo and illustration by Victoria Okoye)

Her spoken words and her colored dustbins act as an organizing entity through which she puts into relation different geographic locations, bodies, materials, desired, and experiences, through a sensitivity toward residents' practices of littering, where the rubbish collectors can access to service the skips, children's play practices at a schoolyard pitch used for football (an existing location), as well as at the zoo (a feature that Emmanuel and Jordan dream up on the group map). From the grounds of her enfolded experiences of neglect, she speculates a new assembling of these materials, bodies, practices from which new affective experiences, grounded in her desire towards cleanliness. Through her words and her colored drawings, she performs bounded acts and produces a vision that "offer[s] pathways to distinctive understandings of [her] suffering that serve as the speculative blueprint for new forms of humanity" (Weheliye, 2014, p. 14). In the face of political and structural violence, hers and other students' contributions, which they map in various colors, demonstrate their desires to move beyond the boundaries placed on them and their neighborhood, imagining each otherwise than what they have been found to be, or known to be, something Usman points out concerning the predominant stereotypes that stigmatize Nima (Tamboukou, 2008, p. 365).

I also want to relate these children's desires and speculative interventions toward cleaner community space with their own individual performative practices of personal, embodied cleanliness that intervene in our discussions, meetings, and activities. Here, I consider their performative practices to be their "reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'" (Butler, 1993, p. 243), distinct from Nusrat's bounded acts that I mention above. Thirteen of the 17 SOI students (and all SOI team members) are Muslim, and as part of their religious practice, they carefully wash their hands, feet, and face before bending down for prayers multiple times daily. As a group, we wash our hands before we sit down to eat individually or together (water that they pour from plastic water pots onto rubbed hands, which hits the ground, and makes its way into the Nima gutter). Everyday, we leave our shoes and sandals outside, and Fati or Larry would sweep and mop the office space each afternoon upon opening the office to maintain a clean, cool floor for the children to read, draw, paint, pray, and learn computer technologies at desks. We together collect the rubbish from our workshops, meetings, and daily activities at the end of each day for deposit in a nearby skip. We also enact these embodied practices before, during, and after this mapping workshop, pausing our activities, in which the children produced their networked map of spatial improvements, including the numerous dustbins, to meet these

requirements. Butler (1993) emphasizes how such performative embodiments shape one's subjectivity. Saba Mahmood (2005), writes that individuals' embodied techniques of daily religious practices, such as the Muslim SOI students' practices of washing, and of prayer, are continually learned, including in childhood. She argues that these practices not only shape the subject but intend to also shape their external environment. If the desire to pray is not only the cause but also the result (such that "in praying, we actively cultivate both the ability to pray and the pious self who prays" (Spatz, 2015, p. 53)), then in these students' practices of handwashing and careful discarding of waste, they are also always enacting in themselves and the present the cleanliness that they associate with Godliness.

These practices already point to their already everyday practices of imagining Nima otherwise, through the repetitive character of the norms they already put to work within the space of the NGO office. It is from that present sphere that they in turn extend to speculate other possibilities for themselves within the community spaces of their neighborhood. It is *within* this SOI office environment and *between* these mundane and embodied practices of cleanliness and care reinstated moment to moment, every day - perhaps less well known about Nima, and for outsiders perhaps impossible to conceive of Nimanians, yet repeatedly punctuating and structuring the flow of our research activities - that the children map out new relational possibilities for their interactions with the gutter, the drain, and the rubbish in their environment. In Mutawakil's words, magic: They enact, write, and tell stories that create the potential for other forms of becoming for their neighborhood and their critical roles within these new relations. Their stories and mapped locations of dustbins exist as an anterior tense of the Black feminist futurity that Weheliye (2014) defines as essential to imagining freedom toward a new genre of humanity (p. 128). This Black feminist futurity is "that which will have had to happen...a performance of a future that hasn't yet happened but must. It is an attachment to a belief in what should be true, which impels us to realize that aspiration" (Campt, 2017, p. 17). Within this Black feminist futurity, the SOI students imagine themselves and their friends as actors who affect community action toward cleaning up their community spaces, both covering the drain and locating rubbish bins throughout their neighborhood. Through their works, they show us "the importance of responsible, reciprocal and caring relations" with these elements, and their creative re-imaginings of these material bodies and their own reach toward new entanglements of human experience (Nxumalo, 2020a, p. 41).

Part 2:

“Our Community Nima” by Abdul Majeed: Being sacked from space and embodied practices of play

Abdul Majeed's self-introduction

I am a male. I am fifteen years old. I attend [school] and I'm in Form three (3). I am a Muslim and I like to read story books. (individual writeup, February 2020)

“Our Community Nima” by Abdul Majeed

Not too long time ago lived a community named Nima in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. It was believed that the community was named after its ancestral king named Nii Manj. Children and other elderly people feel unsafe in the community because of the evil acts of its citizens. There lived a young boy by the name of Tongoro who likes playing with his friends in the lungus. He never felt safe whenever he played in lungus with his friends. They were always sacked and driven away anytime they go to play. They saw that playing in the lungus of their own community was not safe for them so they one day decided to play in a lungu near to the Assembly Man's house. That day was not their lucky day and as they were playing football, a boy by the name of Karim kicked the ball and it hit the Assembly Man's face. He caught them and took them to his house. He punished them severely and drove them out of his house.

They all went home weeping and Tongoro narrated to his father the whole incident. His father as the elder of the community thought much about that and brought an idea. He discussed it with the other elders and they decided to include the Assembly Man. They also discussed with the Assembly Man and he put the case in front of the government. The government gave the Assembly Man the necessary amount that will be needed to build a community park where the children will play. He discussed the issue with the elders of the community on how to build a community park. Before the government gave the money to him, it was a very tough struggle and the community members had to go for a demonstration before the government came to their aid. One week later, the construction of the park began. The young men used cement blocks to build a fence around the park. The children were asked to weed the bush and the women fetched the water which will be necessary for the job. One month later, the park was completed and the park was placed in charge of the assembly.

The Assembly Man decided to organize a competition between the members of the community. Boys were playing football and the girls played ampe. The winners were given a very big prize and the losers were also awarded but not as those who won. From that time, both the children and the grownups lived happily ever after in the community. Thank you.

In this Part 2, I trace connections between Abdul Majeed's speculative story and the other SOI students' experiences of displacement that leads to their fugitive, unsettled, constantly shifting embodied methods of finding and creating recreation, leisure, and sociality in community space. Abdul Majeed writes the story of young boys who search for and find a place to play football in the lungu but are also pushed out and displaced from these very spaces, and he speculates another possibility: a community park communally produced by all of the residents, where each person has a contributing role in its construction and usage. I read this short story and the SOI students' experiences through themes generated in our analysis workshops: concerning the everyday activities that take place in public and community space, how "adults overpower the young ones" in community space, and children's "recreational places" and "personal spots" in Nima. I begin with the predominant ways that adults use and define community space, which sets the scene for the ways children are often displaced and then employ methods of creating other spaces for themselves. This evidences the myriad ways in which Nima residents occupy and inhabit community space, part of a communal programming that normalizes a fugitive spatiality of community space. This field of practice also operates through its own power dynamics, which work to displace children from these sites. In this section, I explore these experiences of being "sacked" (fugitivity) as an assemblage through which community space is made. This renders them less-than-human and their environment uninhabitable but is also the field for their spatial practices to produce their own (fugitive) moments, their own spaces of joy and pleasure, and their own politics of living. In reading Abdul Majeed's story alongside the SOI students' experiences, I pay attention to the ways that the SOI students demonstrate their performances of play, leisure, and social activity in community space as continually inventive, and also unsettled (and unsettling) embodied spatial practices.

Activities that happen on the public space

Within Nima, there are multiple and diverse ways in which residents use the neighborhood's community spaces, which the SOI students here describe as "public space." From religious meetings and celebrations to outdoorings, weddings, funerals, festivals, and other community events, these gatherings, performances, and activities form a social and spatial fabric of "important things in the environment" for the neighborhood (SOI students, analysis workshop, January 28, 2019) These events and activities demonstrate the everyday ways in which adults occupy and employ community space as they engage in their spatial operations. These gatherings, such as infant outdoorings, wedding celebrations, and funerals in lungus or street, bring together dozens or even a hundred people. The larger,

community-wide cultural celebrations like Sallah for Eid-al-Fitr draw thousands of people to the main Nima Highway and other neighborhood streets. These are also ephemeral events and activities in an ever-shifting terrain with multiple competing demands for space.

In our group mapping process, the SOI students indicate many of these local celebrations in their own ways of using and knowing the street, demonstrating the connections between these happenings and their participation in them. For example, 14-year-old Joshua indicates the Aboakyere Festival on the map: “It’s a festival, and they’re celebrating it on the street,” he says. He marks one of the locations in Nima where the deer hunting festival honoring the deity Penkye Otu takes place each year in May, organized by the Effutu people from Winneba in Ghana’s Central Region (Akyeampong, 2019). In this same workshop, 13-year-old Hamid states that it is “mostly youngest people and old people who are doing some engagement on the street such as marriage, outdoor, and funeral.” These activities and gatherings, which are planned in advance as eventful, ephemeral happenings within the street and sidewalk pavement, are commonplace in Nima as well as many other Accra neighborhoods (Osei-Tutu, 2000). In one of his PhotoVoice images, Tanko captures a weekend funeral meeting underway at the sidewalk pavement. Down the road from the major Nima Market, under two colored tents, adult men gather and sit together in rented creme-colored plastic chairs:



Image 38. PhotoVoice image (above) and caption (below) by Tanko

“This is a funeral gathering beside the sidewalk of the Nima Market. But this is Muslims who are having the meeting of a funeral. The positive of that is they pray for the person who dies and other dead people. But the negative is that where they have organized the meeting is not good it is a dangerous place for that meeting.”

In Nima, residents occupy the street in various ways, situating themselves at the pavements, streets, lungus, and open spaces, perhaps for a morning, or afternoon, running their activities in blocked-off spaces they claim for their purposes. Here, it is for prayer, conversation, and collective mourning. As Tanko mentions, where they have gathered is a “dangerous place for that meeting,” a topic that I take up in the next part (Part 3) of this chapter. Still, from smaller gatherings, like the above gathering of men in mourning, to larger, community-wide gatherings, these practices form an expected element within the topography of the neighborhood.

Sallahfest, one of the largest street festivals in the city, is the yearly celebration of Sallah (Eid-al-Fitr) in Nima, and in particular takes place along the Nima Highway, the major street running the length of the neighborhood. This road is already the site of the major weekly market each Wednesday, where street vendors and hawkers extend their commercial activity outward from the built Nima market into the pavement, streets, and median of the roadway in an expansive agglomeration of regional-local trading. It is perhaps this consistent event that each Wednesday overtakes much of the street, and in so doing, creates and holds the potential (and expectation) for this road to be similarly occupied by others, even in other ways. The Sallahfest event instantiates the religious and cultural practice of the *durbar* (a public outdooring of religious or political leaders as a display power and authority) through processions, performances, and the act of assembly along and adjacent to the roadway. Such processions might be traced to the pre-jihad public processions of emirs, who would be mounted on horse and escorted by an illustrious entourage in strategic displays of power and authority as a strategic war preparation, which has served as blueprint for practices for Muslim celebrations and festivities in northern Nigeria and more widely (Garba, 2010). Sallahfest is largely an adult-centered event, and becomes an instance where children, following the older crowds, can also inhabit the street, and observe the activities, as Tanko describes in our group mapping workshop: “Sometimes when they’re doing Sallahfest... when they’re doing the *kashikashika*, you see a king sitting on the horse and his guard is holding his umbrella, his *abawa*. In Sallahfest in the midnight, they will do a show, a very big show, sometimes they invite the superstars, rap stars like Shatta Wale, and they come and perform and dance.”



Image 39. Sallahfest 2019 procession on Nima Road (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

Working together, Emmanuel (in blue), Sulley (in brown), and Abdul Majeed (in red) represent different elements of Sallahfest in the group map:



Image 40. Section of group map indicating Sallahfest activities (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

In many ways it seems that adults' usage of space, which consists of occupying street or lungu or open spaces for short or longer periods of time to meet, celebrate, mourn, or ritualize aspects of local culture, define a spatial logic that becomes understood as norm in the neighborhood. The disruptions that these

events produce for pedestrians and motor traffic becomes perhaps frustrating but also accepted ways in which residents use space. The coming together of past and present events and moments, the rituals, bodies, ideas, events, celebration, mourning, the shared bonds between those gathered, the chairs, tents, and material space produce community space as a platform for these events to take place. These multiple and varied practices, through which different groups are always inhabiting space. In sometimes similar and sometimes different ways, these gatherings demonstrate how the “processual everyday practicality of dwelling highlights the very acts of assembling...the city as a place that is not just inhabited but which is produced through that inhabiting” (McFarlane, 2011, p. 651). As a spatialized practice of knitting together history with present potential, the coming together for these events are always producing these material sites as community spaces. As I discuss in the following section on the ways adults overpower children, this ability to be recognized as valid space users by other community residents enables adults to claim community spaces for their own gatherings, events, and activities.

“Adults overpowering the young ones”

The above examples illustrate the adult-centered modes of claiming various community spaces in Nima, and within this field of spatial practices, the SOI students discuss the various ways they are dispossessed by adults’ usages of space, both for the above activities and others. As Abdul Majeed writes in his story, Tongoro and his friends are “always sacked and driven away anytime they go to play,” and the SOI students use this word “sacked” to describe their physical ejection from places by adults and older youth, whether by verbal or physical means. They describe experiences wherein adults and older youth exercise power and authority over children in community spaces, by creating their own smoking zones and bases (the leisurely hang out spots, popularly claimed by young men), by placing tires, stones, and tables in community space to mean “no way” to prohibit others’ entrance, and by physically sacking the children from spaces. These experiences inform the children’s reality that “the child has less power [than older youth or adults] when it comes to using public spaces” (SOI students, analysis workshop, February 2, 2020).

When adults claim these spaces, they in effect become “no-go” areas for the SOI students as well as others. Adults place their bodies and materials such as tires, stones, tables, and signs to mark “no way” in Nima’s streets and block traffic, sometimes with limited success. The SOI students describe the ways in which adults establish themselves in community space through physical methods, and

both girls and boys describe experiences of being sacked from lungu and pavement spaces they would seek to inhabit. For example, Abdul Majeed produces a PhotoVoice image and caption capturing how adults crowd the lungu with their bodies, benches, and drums for the funeral event. Their coming together in the lungu is a collective decision about how the space should be used in that moment, in this case, a space for mourning, and determines the operations possible within that space.



Image 41. PhotoVoice image (above) and caption (below) by Abdul Majeed

“This picture shows a funeral ceremony which was ongoing in the community (lungu). If this funeral was not going on, some children use it to play football, to play hide and seek with their friends, and others also use it as a base. Due to how the people celebrating the funeral have overcrowded the small space, it is not so easy for a person to take this location to reach his/her destination, the person needs to take another place to reach where he/she wants to go.”

As Abdul Majeed observes, this temporary gathering displaces the football, hide-and-seek games, and social activities that children and youth might otherwise use this space for, as well as its role of this space as a pedestrian passageway. This is part of the plethora of ways that adult residents construct their space and place in the lungus alleyways and other sites, practices which also force children to relocate

their own games to other locations or postpone them. Children are forced by funeral activities taking up lungu space to pause or relocate their football games or their paths home from school to the market, or elsewhere.

In the group mapping workshop, Nusrat marks out a base as one of her own no-go areas where she cannot enter, saying: “This is a base in the lungu. Men sit there and they chat. But they are old men, so they don’t allow children there. If we go there, they sack us,” she says. In the same workshop, Tanko marks out an internet café, saying: “It’s not good for children, when you enter, they’ll sack you by the owner. The internet café is on the pavement.” Both of them make clear that it is age and related factors that informs who can claim these spaces, as well as sack other, younger people, from that space. Abdul Majeed’s story illustrates various forms of power that adults, in this case of his story, the assemblyman and elders, possess over children. When Karim accidentally kicks the football in the Assembly Man’s face, the man catches the kids, takes them to his house, and he “punished them severely.” I read Abdul Majeed’s use of the word “punish” not as arbitrary violence or crime in society, but rather an extension of this community discipline, even conceptualized as tutelage, which normalizes the disciplinary power of adults over young people, and young people over adolescents and children. These experiences also reflect scholarship showing that as part of children’s relative subordinate status, “there is a general expectation that children show respect and submissiveness toward adults” (Adinkrah, 2018, p. 2396). These forms of discipline and punishment, part of the social ethic and enacted from the subtle to the deeply forceful, also mingle with the forms of adult and older people’s dominant presence in and their ability to direct and determine activities in community space. This normalizes adults’ command over children and younger people and adults’ capacity to enact their envisaged appropriate use of these spaces, affecting children by reducing their own capacity to do so. Adults can use this power to determine which spaces children can (and cannot) use and to discipline these children in their use of those spaces. Adults, who are older, who command greater physical strength, social respect, and who can own space, are more able to ground their claims, identities, and presence in community space, while simultaneously displacing children from these sites.

This dynamic adds nuance to the previous statements by SOI students and their descriptions of being made out-of-place in community spaces dominated by older residents. As the children map these inaccessible geographies within their neighborhood, they are also describing how adults claim space in ways that simultaneously exclude their presence as children. In the instances where the SOI

students describe being sacked, the threats are immediate, physical, and potentially painful, like the “severe” punishment that lands Tongoro home in tears.

In an example from Part 1 of this chapter (Usman, Tanko, and Emmanuel’s story on the drain), pollution and makeshift dumpsites produce environmental hazards for children and other Nima residents. These practices of dumping and pollution also deter these children from settling in and inhabiting community spaces, whether for play or social activities. As these children encounter these violences, hazards, and other forces that reduce their potential in occupying these spaces, they are also limited in their ability to speak up and speak about these exclusions, to express themselves in directly challenging their elders in the usage of these spaces. The SOI students articulate their inability to directly resist and challenge adults from their own embodied positions as children. In their short stories and the realities of the power hierarchies that shape community space then, these SOI students also imagine embodying authority. For example, Usman, Tanko, and Emmanuel in their stories narrate masculine agents of change: two SOI students who are teenage boys who jumpstart and galvanize the community into action; the Nima assemblyman who donates cement, sand, and pays the water bill for the project; and Dr. Mustapha (named after the SOI team member) who provides a “huge” monetary contribution. Abigail and Hiba, in their emphasis on what government authorities should do for them and their environment to provide dustbins, imagine a similar gendering of authority and influence. Their words connote an understanding and assumption of authority embodied in a masculine individual, including but not necessarily someone older, someone in a government position (assemblyman or parliamentarian), with prestige, wealth, or access to monies through personal wealth or a government budget.

This is something that in the previous section Hiba mentions explicitly in her complaint concerning the accumulation of rubbish that pushes her and her friends out of their once-play space: “Sometimes I get disturbed, but I can’t talk because I don’t have any authority,” she writes.” Again, these disturbances as she moves through these neighborhood spaces keep her unsettled in terms of finding her community spaces; this experience also reinforces the ways in which community space is made uninhabitable for children in Nima through these practices and power dynamics. In her own lived experience, it is the gradual accumulation of rubbish as well as these power dynamics that transform that site into dumping ground, that prevent her from speaking up, and that force her to relocate her play. Hiba and the other children navigate the decisions of their authorities and the

practices and operations of their neighbors, and peers as they also navigate their material spatial environment.

And yet, even adults' spatial claims to community space can be tenuous and susceptible to disruption. For example, both Hiba and Abdallah share memories of adult family members' weddings in the street that were disrupted by passing vehicles. While I expand on the dangers of such activities in the street space in the next part of this chapter (Part 3), I mention this here to qualify that even for adults, with their own claims to space, can be punctured and interrupted by other adults. In our body mapping workshop, Hiba shares a memory of the disrupted wedding ceremony of her mother's friend, explaining that the women had forgotten to put a sign indicating to drivers they were holding an event at the street. "They have to write "NO WAY" on the table, but they didn't do that. So, a car was coming, he lost his brake, so when he was coming, he came with full speed, so he knocked all the women that day," she said.

When Abdallah presented his body map, he had a similar story: "We always do marriage ceremony on the street." In light blue marker, he draws in the middle of his thigh four people gathered around a tent for awule (marriage ceremony), much in the same way they would assemble in the middle of the street for this event.

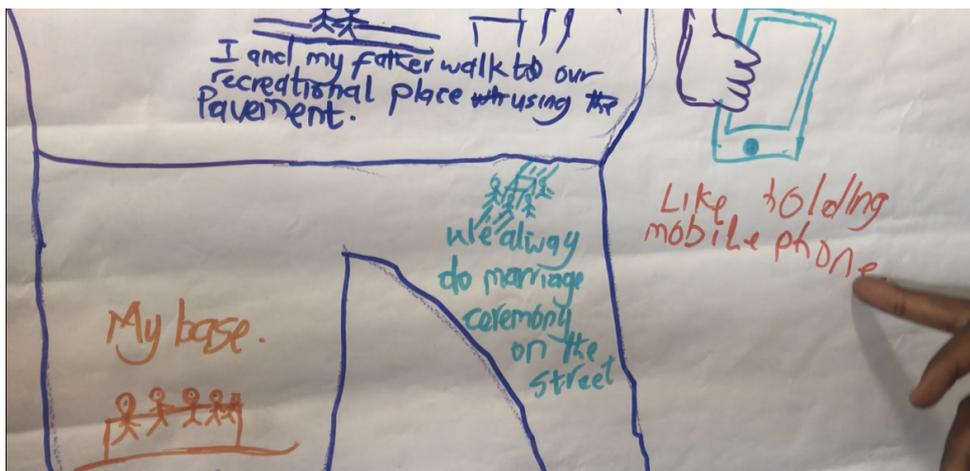


Image 42. Abdallah presents her body map (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

In presenting this aspect of his body map, Abdallah says:

"The memory I have is that once when we were doing the awule. It was my uncle who was doing the awule, and they put a tent on the street. A big truck came, and when it came, it came with all the speed. We told him to stop, and he just stopped, and he was carrying a lot of drinks. So, all the drinks fell down and all the Nima

boys came to take some and run, they came to take and run, they came to take and run.”

Abdallah’s repetition (“and all the Nima boys came to take some and run, they came to take and run, they came to take and run...”) evokes for me the commotion caused by the fallen drinks, the Nima boys scrambling for them, perhaps in waves, and the disrupted wedding celebration. Abdallah locates this memoried drawing inside his body, at his thigh, and I imagine these boys running and taking free drinks, their legs moving quickly as they run back and forth.

Children making their own “recreational places” and “personal spots”

As adults and older youth dominate the usage of community space, children employ their own fugitive methods to, like Tongoro in Abdul Majeed’s story, search for the spaces they can make into their “recreation places” for play and “personal spots” for leisure. Abdul Majeed centers in his short story the creative spatial practices of boys who transform lungus into sites to play football, but with mixed success. Yet his story opens up to the wide and multiple ways in which children and young people creatively search for and make place for themselves, by reading their spatial landscape and its existing operations, discerning, and continually and creatively producing their own fleeting and ephemeral places where they can experience together joy, laughter, movement, gathering, excitement, and pleasure (Krishnan, 2019a; Hunter et al., 2016). In this section, I focus on the SOI students’ everyday practices of hanging out and play, which, critically, they produce together, in the same way that Abdul Majeed speculates the community might produce a community park through communal efforts. In sharing their experiences, both girls and boys describe and detail the different games they play, the different places they hang, and where: Boys describe their experiences playing football in the lungus and at a schoolyard pitch, an open field in premises of a nearby school, and girls describe playing tug-of-war or ampe, a two-player or four-player strategy game involving jumping and clapping. Both girls and boys describe playing cassé (table football) and forming their hang out “bases.” Through these embodied practices of play and leisure, I explore how these children imagine and transform seemingly unusable spaces into useful sites for meaningful moments of recreation, leisure, chatting, and being with friends as everyday practices.

In our PhotoVoice workshop, many of the boys head to a schoolyard pitch to capture photos and words centering their experiences playing football there. “This is an open space where some people made it a park. They use the space to play football and other sporting activities,” Abdul Majeed describes. Like many other

community spaces, the space is taken up by multiple, competing uses, and children have access to the space when it is not taken by adults or older youth for their own gatherings:



Image 43. PhotoVoice image (above) and caption (below) by Abdul Majeed

“This is an open space where some people made it a park. They use the space to play football and other sporting activities. Others also used it to make ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, outdoorings, naming ceremonies and church services.”

“I play football with my friends in the lungus after school,” Abdul Majeed explains to me in presenting his body map. He used to play at the schoolyard pitch in the above image until “there a certain boy got hurt and I never went to [there] again,” he says. Many of the other boys also describe their experiences playing football after school and on weekends at this pitch, and the rough experiences that shape for them where and when they can play:



Image 44. PhotoVoice image (above) and caption (below) by Usman

“As long as it’s a pitch, everyone is opened to it and no one has authority over it since it’s an open space. When children come to play football, grown ups come later to play and we the children have to give them the place to play. The children have to go to the other side of the pitch which is an uncompleted building with pillars and no roofing. Just the foundation. We get hurt a lot because there is only cement and rocks all around. When the grownups finish with the pitch and go away, we go back to the pitch and play.”

“As long as it’s a pitch, everyone is opened to it and no one has authority over it since it’s an open space,” writes 15-year-old Usman in his PhotoVoice caption accompanying the adult men in their orange jerseys, black shorts, mid-play of a football match in the open pitch. While he and other SOI students assert that no one “owns” the lungus, streets, pavements, and open spaces, they acknowledge and name the different social forces that delimit and displace their access to and use of these spaces. In this case, adult male players who force these young boys to relocate their football play from the open school pitch elsewhere.

When sacked by the older youth or adult men football players, the boys say, they move to a nearby uncompleted building on the same compound. This uncompleted building consists of 20 vertical cement columns encasing reinforced bar steel that extend upward from the building's rough foundation. The boys estimate that the building has been in this state of material incompleteness for four years, and I read this uncompleted building as part of the incrementally built environment of the city. Perhaps in this case, the school's owners draw on personal investments to finance piecemeal construction, yielding a gradual building process, or, stalled financial investments lead to stagnated construction (such as in the case of the stalled Nima sanitation infrastructure in Part 1 of this chapter). These skeletal cement frames of houses, commercial and office buildings are a common feature across Accra's urban landscape, demonstrating one aspect in which the city is in a constant material process of becoming. In the lag time that the skeletal frames remain, residents' practices of occupying and dwelling in spaces, whether for short periods of football play, or longer periods of residing "open up a space for piecing together an alternative urban life" (Vasudevan, 2015, p. 342). While throughout Accra these practices may vary, at this uncompleted building, it is young boys' frequent football games. For these young boys, this form of using this building for their football play is a matter of necessity - one that produces laughter, competitive shouts, and cheers, sweat, scrapes and bruises, wins and losses as they play their matches. Regularly sacked by the older youth and adult men from the football pitch, the boys in turn regularly occupy this uncompleted building for their own games.

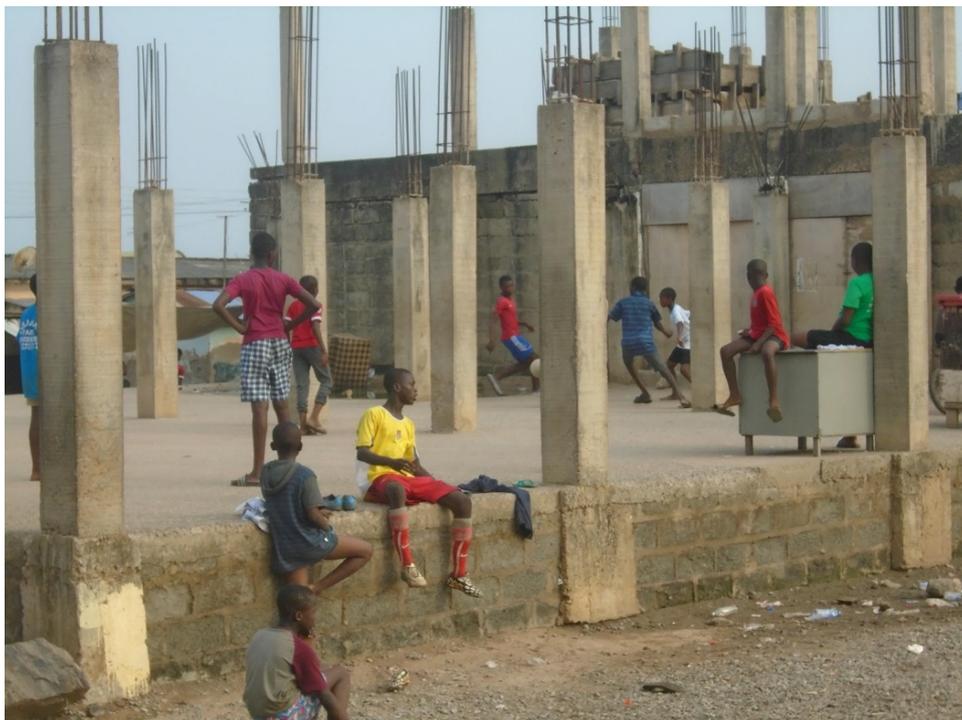


Image 45. PhotoVoice image (above) and caption (below) by Hamid

“This picture shows a open space where children go and play football and score goals. Sometimes they might be training. But mostly I go to the park every weekend and holidays to have fun with my friends.”

Within spatial constraints and uneven power dynamics, the young boys imagine and find alternative possibilities for this space, and through their actions create new experiences. They modify their games to suit their smaller space, and they still frame these spaces as open: “This picture shows an open space where children go and play football and score goal,” writes Hamid in his caption accompanying his photo of boys playing football, some in the motion of weaving themselves between the pillars at the building’s pillars. His framing of these spaces as “open” demonstrates both an imagining of these spaces and their embodied practices to open up these spaces to new possibilities. Through the boys’ football play in this uncertain, temporary, and uncompleted architectural space, they demonstrate how community space, through its incompleteness (or, the fact that it is in the process of being completed), this building is made open to other processes that influence or possibly transform it (DeLanda, 2016; Kraftl, 2006). After all, what was this site before but concrete, metal, and dirt, until they imagined and then made it a place for their football matches through their footwork, shouts, penalties, and goals?

“Football is normally played by 11 players,” explains 14-year-old Joshua in one of his PhotoVoice captions. But here, in this uncompleted building, the boys adapt their matches to this smaller, constrained, space, to three-on-three, or four-on-four. The players move, back and forth, around and between the pillars, dribbling the ball and evading opposing team members to make way to their goal. Moving around the pillars becomes part of the game. The adult men, the grownups who sack them from the large football pitch, aren’t interested in this space, leaving it to the boys to use among themselves. In that manner, the young boys depend on the incompleteness and seeming inhabitation of this space in order to use it for their own recreational purposes. So, the boys resourcefully read the topography of Nima’s inhabitable environment so as to efficiently navigate their own uses, opening up and adjusting to spaces, and making their space for play in a context where multiple forces would make such habitation impossible (Simone, 2019, p. 93). They move, run, dodge within the gaps of space between each pillar, making space for their plays and strategic moves. Their footwork and bodywork become an embodied method of making “livable moments, spaces, and places in the midst of all that was unlivable” around them (Sharpe, 2020, p. 20).

While their attempts to make use of these spaces are generally successful, they also come with the painful repercussions of recreating in tight, often unwelcoming, locations: cuts, bruises, wounds, or other injuries. From his body map, Usman draws an arrow pointing from his forehead to another image, an incident of him running into one of the pillars at the uncompleted building: “I hit my head on a pillar whilst playing football at a pitch,” he writes. When Usman recounts this story to me, I touch my own forehead; I think about the pain of impacting the cement pillar, the way the pain comes moments after the hit. As described in the previous section, discomfort, pain, and danger (the threats and realities of bodily injury) become inevitable aspects of children’s lived experience in this and other spaces in Nima. They become part of the histories of a space, repeated through physical body scars or the retained stories of one’s own, or a friend’s injuries, tumbles, collisions, and crashes as a result of seeking to fully embody play and life in tight, constrained spaces. These constraints require these children to take care, to be vigilant and observant, to look out for the possibilities of danger, even when at play. As 13-year-old Hamid explains in his own body map, where he envisions himself wearing pink, criss-crossed football cleats: “Sometimes when I’m playing football on the park, if I do not take good care of myself, I might get hurt.”

Yet this same tight, rough, obstacle-laden place also holds space for hopeful possibilities and future dreams, such as to one day become a footballer, as 15-year-old Salam, like other boys, describes below. Their footwork is practice of “beauty that propels [their] experiments of living otherwise,” as everyday, even mundane ways of finding possibility amidst their lived realities of enclosure (Hartman, 2019, p. 33).



Image 46. PhotoVoice image (above) and caption (below) by Salam

“There live a boy who is about 14 to 15 years old. He like to become a footballer in future. So he always practices at the field. He always plays football. One thing I like about that boy is that he is ready to attack his enemies. I also give him a good luck to be a footballer in future.”

While many of the boys situate their recreative practices and experiences as distinct from household responsibilities and constraints, many of the girls frame their activities in connection with completing household activities, like staying home or close to home in case their parents need to send them to the market to purchase food and household items. The girls share spaces for play and hanging out experiences that are close to their homes. For example, 16-year-old Nusrat discusses the lungu near her home as a site of play, and in the PhotoVoice workshop, she documents two of these places. She describes hanging out and recreational places for jumping rope and playing ampe, a competitive strategy game that girls play, either one-on-one or two-on-two, involving jumping and clapping.



Image 47. PhotoVoice image (above) and caption (below) by Nusrat

“There is a lungu in front of my house. Everyday after school, a lot of children gather here to play and hang out. It’s spacious but occasionally they have to move for people to pass. Children like to come here because it’s not far from their home. It’s very nice having a place of their own to hang out. I took this picture because it is something I see all the time and I admire.”

Like in Abdul Majeed’s story, Nusrat sets a scene where neighborhood children gather after school to play at the house of someone they know, in front of a neighbor's (Nusrat’s own) house. This play space in the lungu provides a platform for play, bonding, and building friendship through their activities. This space, in proximity to their own homes, enables them a nearby place to play that also falls under the protection of a trusted and respected neighbor. They range in ages, perhaps as young as 4 or 5 years and as old as 9 or 10 years. Perhaps like one SOI student, 10-year-old Widad, who sometimes comes to the SOI office with her small sister in tow, these children join as friends, bringing along a younger sibling who tags along to also play or needs to be watched and cared for. Situated at the front of a shop, their after-school recreation and hanging out here can only take place outside of the shop owner’s operating hours. In addition, they have this space to play and hang out until they are pushed to the side by older people, perhaps older youth, or adults, who require them to give up the space for their passing through. In this way, their play takes place in between others’ usage of the space, making their

ability to inhabit and play here always provisional, continually halted, and fleeting (Hunter et al., 2016).

As Nusrat mentions in her caption, this space is also accessible because it is close to the children's homes. I make connections here to these girls' reality and Hajia Mariam's earlier framing in the background context chapter (Chapter 2) on the gendering of household responsibilities, which also restrict women's leisure time in community space. From a young age, the eldest children and girls' access to time for leisure and recreation is already circumscribed by their assigned household responsibilities, and in many instances, the girls describe their household tasks of cleaning, washing clothes, going to the market, and helping to prepare food. While this doesn't negate the responsibilities that boys might also have, by and large, in this research process the boys share less about these responsibilities (and having such responsibilities). Therefore, for girls who typically carry more household responsibilities and younger children generally who must operate within a smaller sphere of movement to wander away from their homes, their access to spaces for play and leisure is typically more restricted and regulated than for older children and older children who are boys (Boyden et al., 2016). So, the boys, who talk about playing at the schoolyard pitch and uncompleted building, are potentially more able to wander or move further off from home to search and occupy playing spaces, as well as to play more freely or less encumbered by household responsibilities. For girls, who potentially must circulate within a more restricted sphere of movement enforced by parents or caregivers, these nearby makeshift playground spaces become accessible and safe sites to meet, interact, and play (Pedrosa et al., 2021).



Image 48. PhotoVoice image (above) and caption (below) by Nusrat

“This place behind my house used to be open and smooth. My friends and I used to hang out here after our house chores, playing tug of war and ampe with other games. One day we gathered as usual to play, but were shocked with the bitter reality that gravels and stones have been piled there. Though we ignored it and played on it the first day. We got several cuts and bruises. That’s when we knew it was now dangerous to play here. Since then we don’t go there anymore. I choose this because I will never forget the memories.”

Construction in lungu spaces, which the Nima elders mentioned lead to ever-shrinking community space, also enclose the spaces that Nusrat and other girls would use to play with their friends. In one of her PhotoVoice photos and captions, she captures a lungu where she used to play, then under construction. This process displaces children like Nusrat who used this place for playing games like tug-of-war and ampe, small ways of establishing their presence through repeated use of the space over time. The image and Nusrat’s words depict the current status in which construction work is underway, a context where an incremental infrastructure built by adult residents to advance their collaborative interests (Silver, 2014) simultaneously uproots the ground of the passageway and children’s play there. A semi-filled cement bag, uprooted pipes, gravel, and stones litter the ground from

wall to wall, rendering it an uneven level and broken. This process, these materials, and the desires of individuals to make changes to the lungu come together in transforming the lungu from a place conducive for Nusrat and her friends to play to a site where such play has become, for now, impossible. She describes her and friends' initial attempt to carry on playing, and the bruises and cuts they received in that process, demonstrating the space had become too dangerous for children's play. "Since then, we don't go there anymore," Nusrat writes. In this lungu, unlike the uncompleted building used by the boys for football play, the process of in-between construction displaces the girls. Here, Nusrat demonstrates another instance where play spaces, even if proximal to their homes and accessible, are also always rendered as provision spaces and sites of potential injury due to the power dynamics of other, older individuals to use it, and to in this case, transform it.

Nusrat also mentions a place behind her house that she shares with friends, an open space where she hangs out frequently. Although she doesn't describe the space as her base, she calls it her "personal place," and she notes how this space comes with the dangers of cars that pass by: "I play there because that is the only personal place I have. The open space is behind my house. Whether you like it or not, a car will pass, and that's also our place to play, so there is nothing to prevent it."

In making other recreational spaces, both girls and boys also take up activities in the sidewalk pavement, inhabiting these sites as places of play, entertainment, and socializing. One common game that both girls and boys describe playing at the sidewalk pavement or in lungus is what they call cassé (also known as table football), and others talk about setting up their own "bases" to gather, sit, and chat with friends. The research scholarship depicts young men who in Nima and similar neighborhood in Accra form in groups to gather and hang out in areas known as "bases" (Cassiman, 2018; Langevang, 2008). While this is true - for example Widad writes in her own PhotoVoice story about a young men's base in her area, built over time for their smoking activities and her avoidance of that site - the children discuss ways that they too form bases with their own communities of friends. For example, Abdullah, in the group mapping workshop, indicates his base and describes the gradual process through which he and his friends formed the spot as theirs:

"A base starts from one person when they come to sit there. The next day, another friend sees them - 'Oh my friend!' and also comes to sit there. Then he sits with him. Then another friend says, 'My friend is sitting there, let me sit with him.' So, it continues that way. Till it becomes a base when everybody comes to sit there.

They talk, do everything there. We are working for a name for our base.”

As Abdallah describes, his base is constructed through the coming together of individuals with friendship alliances over time, available leisure time, unexpected or planned encounters, something to sit on, learnings from others’ similar such practices around them, and an unoccupied space. The base becomes a leisure space where friends come together, sit together, and where multiple activities might take place. Many of the children express wariness around the bases where older youth and young men “sit there to smoke, and abuse drugs,” as Abdul Majeed describes of a base at the schoolyard pitch and Widad of a base in her area. The children’s bases are also gender-specific spaces. For Hamid and his friends, they form a base as a boys-only space: “Mostly I and my friends sit at [our base] to have fun, joke and laugh. I have been going there a long time. It’s in our area. It’s boys going there. Girls will go and play somewhere else,” he says. For Widad, her base is with other girls, and she directs us to its location in the group mapping workshop, saying, “There’s a lungu over there, so when I pass there, I reach my house. And this is my base where I and my sisters and friends hang out.”

Tanko points to his base that he marks out onto the group map. “This my base, where I go and hang out...We share ideas and hang out. I always go to my base because I feel very happy over there. I and my friends share ideas and have fun,” he says. Likewise, for Joshua, his base is a place where he and his friends “go to chat” and “make fun of [themselves].” In addition, some claim the Spread-Out Initiative NGO office as their base: What Sheik calls a “comfortable zone” that the children claim as young people to hang out, socialize, a place they feel is their own. After school, on the weekends, during vacation periods, they spend hours here. During the month-long fasting period of Ramadan also coincided with their school vacation period, the NGO office became a place where kids could rest, sleep through the fasting hours, and at the hour of iftar (breaking fast), join in with the older youth and adults to communally break their fast with dates, tea, watermelon, alele (a spicy boiled bean cake), and jollof rice.

Tongoro and friends’ physical ejection from the lungu in Abdul Majeed’s story, and the SOI students and other children’s lived experiences of physical ejection from the schoolyard pitch, lungus, the sidewalk pavements, and streets, shape the ways they are made out-of-place in community space. These young people then seek out and make space for themselves in uncompleted buildings and at shopfronts after store hours; they create their own bases, and they come to the SOI office. For these

children, these spaces and moments are “transient resting place[s], an impossible refuge... for those forced out, pushed on, displaced always” as these children can “stay but never settle” (Hartman, 2019, p. 23). These children demonstrate myriad means and spaces through and in which they inhabit seemingly uninhabitable spaces as part of their everyday life, particularly through practices of sociality and play. These spaces and the young people’s embodied practices within them are always ephemeral, essential, inventive, also fugitive. They make use of tightly situated spaces as material sites in which to dance, to sit with friends, and to play physically competitive games that are loud, that require multidirectional bodily movements, running and jumping, dancing, and singing, jockeying, challenging, colliding, and likely falling as well.

These are communal sites of togetherness in which they play, watch others play, relax, sit with friends, share ideas, and hang out, places they create through their play and gathering. Within these spaces and moments, the SOI students demonstrate their simultaneous feelings of joy, laughter playing around with friends with feelings of fear and unsafety ties to sacking and displacement. This overlaps with Abdul Majeed’s narrative for Tongoro, who in the story, simultaneously experiences joy playing football with friends in the lungus as well as his fear for bodily safety in these same spaces. This demonstrates how these feelings and experiences coexist, as well as how through their playful and leisurely practices, the children aim toward “reshap[ing] their experiences of inhabiting the city...through an affective experience that reorients the[se] subjects in the city” and recalibrates the potential of these sites (Krishnan 2019, p. 3). The SOI students’ practices of searching for, finding, and inhabiting community spaces in Nima and transforming these sites into locations for play, leisure, and sociality effectively remake interstitial, in-between, and leftover spaces in Nima neighborhood. In these temporary and fleeting moments and spaces, whether repeatedly or one-off, their instantiating themselves in place is part of their transformation of these sites toward other uses and demonstrates how children and young people’s activities produce space through their practices; in recalibrating the potential of these sites, they are constantly working to meet their own needs in a context where governance and planning have not (Shand, 2018).

Further, these playful spatial practices are also part of a wide range of networked and improvised operations employed by residents to inhabit seemingly uninhabitable locations. These children search, find, and retool spaces that can “hold and support” them as children, even if only in temporary ways, within “an atmosphere of things continuously being worked out and proportioned...giv[ing] rise

to a specific, yet changing sense of place” (Simone 2019, p. 4). Their imaginings and performances give rise to “ways of thinking, knowing, and doing [that] are always otherwise... [and which] forge ahead possibilities inside the belly of impossibilities” (Sithole 2020, p. 2). This demonstrates how, within the context of the uninhabitable, there are also always the liminal zone comprising subjection, violence, injury, and wounding, as well as lines of flight as well as the ever-persisting practices, dreams, hopes, and attempts (Weheliye 2014, p. 132). Even if limited, even if ephemeral, even if trying, failing, and trying again, the children articulate a re-imagining and re-making their world, as “alternative forms of liberty and humanity that dwell among us in the NOW” (Weheliye 2014, p. 132) so that they can inhabit “that which is not supposed to be hospitable” (Sithole 2020, p. 5). Through gatherings around play, leisure, and hanging out, these children imagine, find ways, insist on Black life. These liminal moments, whether in the street, in the lungu, in the constrictions of an uncompleted building or shopfront - or even between and across the lines of the page, which I explore in next (Part 3 of this chapter) - become powerful moments of self-expression that enable these children to exist within but also beyond the strictures of space that attempt to confine them.

Part 3:
“Footbridge” by Mariam:
Road accidents and imagining other built environments

Mariam’s self-introduction:

“My name is Mariam and I am 16 years of age. I am chocolate in complexion. I am in SHS 1. My hobbies are reading and swimming. I also love to listen to music a lot. The game I like best is volleyball. I have two siblings and I am the eldest.” (individual writeup, March 2021)

“Footbridge” by Mariam

Faisal is a boy of fifteen years who lived with his mum and three siblings. They lived in a community called 441, a suburb of Nima. Their home is a compound house with about 15 neighbors. There is a big polytank at the corner of their house where all the people in the house fetch water. Mrs. Fatima, mother of Faisal, was a very hardworking mother who would sell koko in the morning, pure water and drinks in the afternoon, and Indomie in the evening at the pavement around the Kanda Highway since it is not far from her house. Faisal, the eldest among the four children, was from school one Tuesday afternoon crying all the way to the house looking for his mother. He came home and could not find her. He looked for her in the whole house and finally thought she would be selling at the streets so he headed to where she was.

Mrs. Fatima was busily going up and down in the hot sun shouting, “Pure water, drinks.” Faisal saw his mother and tried to cross the road to her, as he tried crossing the traffic lights were red so he thought he can cross now. Sooner or later noises were heard from the other side of the road, “Stop, stop” before everyone would realize, there was a motorbike with full speed coming from the other side of the street and knocked Faisal down.

Mrs. Fatima and the others selling at the streets went to see what happened, before she could say anything, it was her son, Faisal. “You were supposed to be in school,” cried Mrs. Fatima. He was sleeping in a pool of blood and tried to tell his mother something. All he could say was “school fees.” He was rushed to the nearby hospital and got treatments. He was admitted for almost two weeks.

Faisal is home, after staying in the hospital for two weeks. He is now better. All that was running in his mind was if there had been a footbridge he could

have used that to reach his mother. He started advocating for the construction of a footbridge at the Kanda Highway; he wouldn't want anyone to be in the situation he had been. Two weeks from school, he had lots to learn. Soon the MP for the community brought up the plan for the construction of the footbridge, three months past, then a year now, since the incident Kanda-Nima community footbridge had been constructed. Now the children in that community are happy because they don't have to use the main street but rather the footbridge.

In this part (Part 3), I draw connections between Mariam's speculative story and three themes that emerge from our analysis workshops: dangerous activities in the street, road accidents, and the SOI students' imagined improvements for a "future Nima." The SOI students describe myriad dangerous activities and behaviors in the street, and some of these have already featured in the previous sections. These dangers include motorcyclists and car drivers' rough driving behavior, which causes accidents and makes their existence in these spaces precarious. When accidents happen, like for Faisal in Mariam's story, these encounters frequently lead to injury or death (SOI students, analysis workshop, January 28, 2020). Here I link the uninhabitability of community space to the intimate, everydayness of dangers, accidents, and injury that have happened and that threaten to happen at the streets and sidewalk pavements, essential spaces these children use to walk and move to school, home, and running errands. Within our space of the research process, the SOI students also imagine a range of possibilities for improving their personal safety. I consider their interventions as well as their relational practices of working together and inspiring each other as they envision together new possibilities for their neighborhood.

Dangerous activities in the street

Mariam and the other SOI students describe the multiple activities that take place in the street, activities that force together different modes and movements and that block both human and vehicular traffic flows. In our analysis workshop, they produce this theme consisting of the multiple different bodies, activities, memories, and their fears. They list livelihood, social, leisure and other activities blocking street space and vehicle movements, human bodies, cars, and motorbikes, and the risky and dangerous behaviors of car drivers and motorbikes in these spaces. They mention the quotidian practices of street vending and hawking, which operate as mobile or stationed activities. This reality is mirrored in Mariam's story through the livelihood work of Faisal's mother, who walks up and down the streetside selling sachets of water to the public, her means of raising income for his and his siblings' school fees. In practice, these commercial activities also slow, thwart, and stop

traffic, operating and inhabiting space alongside motor vehicles. Mariam and the SOI students also describe and enumerate their fears and frustrations with passing vehicles, parked vehicles, motorcycles, and large trucks carrying heavy goods, which threaten pedestrians, mobile and fixed street vendors, as well as themselves as children who use these spaces. The children recognize how all of these bodies, activities, and potential threats populate, move through, and remain the street space and sidewalk pavement, “may cause accidents and kill people as well” (SOI students, analysis workshop, February 2, 2020).

In her PhotoVoice photos and captions, Mariam captures street vendors and their business operations: a mobile yoghurt seller operating at a taxi rank, a mobile beer seller next to a pharmacy, a yam seller close to a mosque, and a cassava and plantain seller next to a busy internet cafe. She uses her captions to describe how the lack of available space in the built Nima Market pushes vendors out into the streets and sidewalk pavements. Each individual has been able to earn profits because “there was market here,” Mariam writes, alluding to the frequency of customers to their vending locations. Her statements here illustrate how these vendors move to where they can access customers to sell their goods. For example, this photo of Auntie Yaa who sells yams:



Image 49. PhotoVoice image (above) and caption (below) by Mariam

“On an open space in Nima, Auntie Yaa sold yam, she said when she was young that they started selling, she was selling with her mother and her mother died and she took over from her mother. She also added that they have been there for forty years. She chose to station here because there is no space in

the market and since that was the only place for her to sell. She said there was market here but the AMA are worrying her and she wants to get a store so that she will start her business there. I chose to write about this because she is on the street and she can easily be killed by a car.”

In Mariam’s PhotoVoice images and captions, she shows how Auntie Yaa is “worried” by the Accra Metropolitan Assembly [AMA], who collect daily payments from many street vendors as well as market vendors, while also regularly harassing and evicting them from their spaces of operation (Owusu-Sekyere, Amoah, & Teng-Zeng, 2016). These experiences show additional elements of insecurity that these vendors frequently experience within these spaces, in addition to physical risks of harm. Mariam ends her caption with a stated concern for Auntie Yaa’s physical safety, as a vendor operating at the street because the packed Nima Market provides no designated space to pursue her livelihood. That day Auntie Yaa poses for Mariam’s photo, and she sits back in her black plastic and metal chair as her two workers sort yams behind her. Mariam illustrates how each of these individuals could one day “easily be killed” in one of the multiple road accidents that she and the other SOI students see everyday. For these children, these community spaces are animated with everyday life and commercial activity, but also with the memories of accidents, injuries, and death, and with its future possibilities. It therefore is significant that, as Mariam describes, Auntie Yaa expresses her desire “to get a store so that she will start her business there.” While these spaces out in the open have provided a rich and long-term market for commercial opportunity for both Auntie Yaa, and perhaps other vendors, does express the desire for a more secure vending location free of the hassles from local government.

These bodies, activities, and transactions, which include the commercial transactions between vendor and customer that make up the “market” of this space, the transport of goods, the loading and unloading of wares, the variety of positions in which vendors display their goods, and the AMA harassments transform this community space into a commercial selling space. The selling, storing, transporting, and displaying of goods also produce this space as a site of livelihoods that spills out from the overcrowded built Nima market, something that Mr. Ibrahim Baro describes in our interview (in Chapter 2). These vending activities at the street and sidewalk pavement illustrate the multiple ways that Mr. Baro and other Nima elders describe how residents claim and occupy community spaces, producing an increasingly dense and built-up neighborhood environment. These

commercial activities also displace pedestrians, including children, forcing them to navigate these teeming spaces, and with implications for everyday safety.

Hamid, in one of his own PhotoVoice images, also witnesses these dangers. He captures a parked motorbike in front of a small shop along the road.



Image 50. PhotoVoice image (above) and caption (below) by Hamid

“This picture shows a street where cars and motors move on it. But people come to build their shops on the street doing their businesses. It is not safe to put up a business on the street where cars and motor bikes are supposed to use, because an accident may cause a loss of life and people’s property. The negative things that occur on the street is when a car knocks somebody.”

The everyday activity in the street also includes the ways cars operate in the street, both the large trucks passing through, and the residents claiming street space with their own parked vehicles. Tanko expresses his fear of the large charcoal trucks that ply the road, their tops nearly spilling with materials that could fall on the people

below. “I am afraid of some trucks that carry charcoal on the street because it can collide easily. I feel that it is not good for a truck to carry much charcoal on the street, because it can collapse and hit someone...I normally walk on the street, but whenever I saw a charcoal truck, I move fast and go away,” he says in the body mapping workshop.

Residents’ parked vehicles take up street space and thereby reduce the available street space, blocking moving traffic, which Hiba articulates: “Sometimes when I’m passing through the streets, I don’t like it because some people park their vehicles. And because of that it causes traffic, and the traffic too can also cause accidents” she says in the body mapping workshop. Later, in the group mapping workshop, she explains further as we crowd around the map of no-go areas: “Here,” she says, pointing to Oku Street on the group map and moving her finger along the street. “I’m talking about the street. You can see people parking their vehicles so that vehicles, maybe the owner is not there, he has gone somewhere. Most of the vehicles, the traffic, it can cause some traffic right now, and the traffic it can bring some accidents on the street, so I don’t like passing there...I think the street is basically meant for the vehicles, but not for parking vehicles.”

These varied and multiple dangers and dangerous activities are part of the children’s everyday experiences at the community spaces of the street and sidewalk pavement. From the interview with Mr. Ibrahim Baro, it becomes clear how these practices have emerged over time, with the claiming of spaces, and from Honorable Shareau Tajudeen, how practices of handing down one’s spaces to other family members also shapes the consistent commercial presence in these locations. These practices and spatial logics further shape the possibilities for these spaces, and the persistence of these spaces as commercial spaces. In addition, the SOI students’ experiences and observations demonstrate the complexities within Mutawakil’s concept of magic, which he first described using the example of the bricklayer who claims and occupies a sidewalk pavement space next to the Nima gutter. As the bricklayer and other individuals claim a space, organize, and implement their own commercial activities, this is always taking place within a context of increasing tightly situated activities, materials, bodies, and presences. It is from this dense assemblage that these community spaces emerge as commercial sites that are packed, unsafe, and dangerous for the children to inhabit. The children express their feelings of discomfort, fear, and potential threats, which move them away from these spaces, or quickly through these spaces, passageways in the neighborhood that are also essential for them as they move from place to place in their daily life. These are also sites where their fears and the threats of being

knocked down by cars, vehicles, and trucks become real through their firsthand observations and memories of these accidents.

Knocked down

Focusing on the road accidents where people are knocked down, the SOI students form this theme demonstrating that “accidents occur in how they ride the motorbikes roughly. It causes accidents [and] some can get seriously injured” (SOI students, analysis workshop, February 2, 2020). Mariam and other SOI students recount instances of seeing road accidents firsthand, where motorbikes or cars “knocked down” women, men, children their age, friends, even animals. At the street, at the pavement, at the park, at intersections, when someone was looking, when someone wasn’t looking. In most instances, as they share these memories, they recount them factually, they accustom themselves to accidents as common occurrences. “A car once knocked down a sheep who was crossing the street when I was playing with my friends,” Mariam says in presenting her body map. “I feel the street is not a safe place to play, and it’s dangerous to walk on the pavement with little children.”

The streets and pavements are dangerous spaces to inhabit, particularly for younger people. These accidents and dangers affectively shape the space and the children’s possibilities for inhabiting these sites for passing and for play. This is a sentiment echoed by Sheik: “I don’t like playing in the street because a car may fail its brake and easily hit me,” he shares in his body map experiences. “It isn’t good for me to play on the street for me as a child because it’s dangerous. Cars and motos [motorbikes] pass there by heart. The street is meant for riders and drivers and not for children to play on.”

Sixteen-year-old Nusrat, through her body map, recounts her own memory seeing a street vendor knocked down by a vehicle on her way to her school one day: “I sit on my uncle’s bike to makaranta [Islamic school] using the streets on Sundays. Once a woman selling on the street got knocked down by a car. I felt bad because the street is not a place to sell.” Her statement also reveals the tension of the contrasting needs, desires, and intentions for these street and sidewalk spaces. For Nusrat, these are “not a place to sell,” but at other moments, she and other SOI students discuss buying food, drinks, or other items from vendors like these. For these vendors, these sites also become essential livelihood spaces in a context where access to selling spaces is limited.

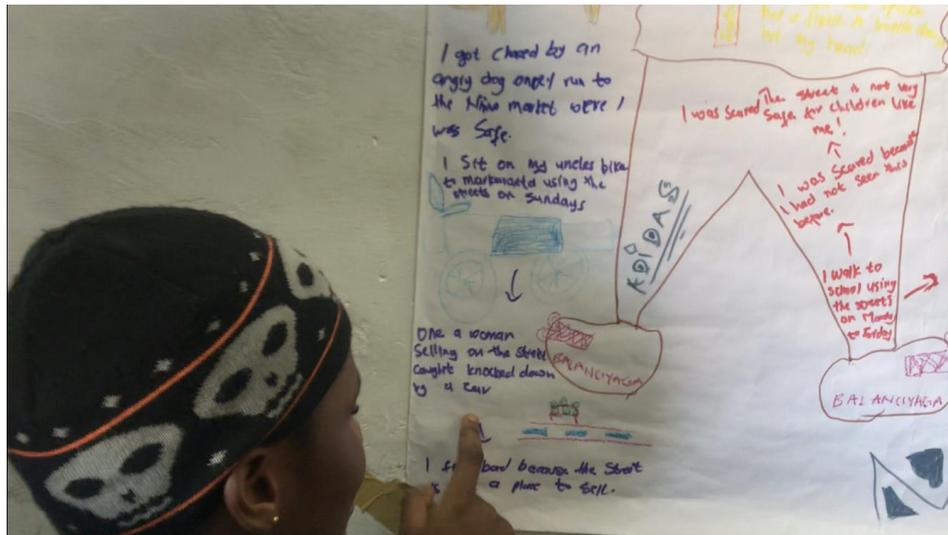


Image 51. Nusrat presents her body map (Photo by Mustapha Adamu)

Nusrat in her body map situates the images and text through which she tells this story close to her foot, and I imagine these same streets and pavements that she, Mariam, Hamid, and the other SOI students walk by foot, perhaps to buy from vendors like Auntie Yaa, as sites haunted by the memories of past accidents and injury. Through their embodied experiences, I read these streets as a spectral landscape wherein “everyday life is a force field of resurgent traces from some past, something not yet laid to rest” (Simone, 2004, p. 92). These past accidents and injuries remain present as unresolved and therefore continued future possibilities, that the children carry with them, that the street and sidewalk pavements also carry, and that the children continually navigate as they move through, avoid, and experience these community spaces. These become an affective element of these spaces, part of the assemblage of dangers and accidents from which the children’s experiences of these sites as uninhabitable also emerges.

The SOI students point out that the street is for vehicles, including the motorbikes, but the SOI students from their own experiences also express the multiple ways that these motorbike riders also make the street unsafe through their riding behaviors. Even in the streets they are meant to occupy, their speeds and movements produce dangers and injuries, which Mariam makes clear in her speculative story concerning Faisal’s accident crossing the street at the red light. In particular, the SOI students describe these young men who ride motorbikes, their engines revving as they whiz through traffic, elevating their front wheels in the air, as “riding roughly.” Sheik extends this description with his statement that “Nima youth ride motorbikes anyhow on the street,” and that these “rough riders ride as if they are mad.”

Mariam's short story and the SOI students' experiences illustrate how, even when following traffic rules, these motorbike riders (who sometimes flout these rules) put the children in danger. On the large group map of no-go and dangerous areas, Emmanuel marks a spot, saying, "Here, a man was sitting on a moto [motorbike] and going, and they usually sit and raise the motorbike. Then somebody turned to pass and fell, and the moto fell on him." Tanko marks a similar incident at an intersection located one minute's walk from the SOI office: "You can see the motor riders raise up their front tires. If it comes down, they can knock the pedestrian down." In this same session, both Joshua and Sheik share their recollections from witnessing the same accident, one in which a young boy close to their age was struck down by a motorbike: "It was a bike, a bicycle hit a certain boy," says Joshua, indicating the same street intersection where Tanko had also marked an accident.

The rough riding presents danger to those on the street, as well as to riders. Some of them are motorcycle taxis (known as okada) who charge cheap fares and are known for taking dangerous risks on the road to arrive quickly to their passengers' destinations (Oteng-Ababio & Agyemang, 2015). The cheap fare and the motorcyclists' ability to weave through traffic jams make it an attractive choice for young people to get from place to place when moving on foot isn't feasible. Abdallah, stricken with a disease in his childhood that left partial paralysis in his legs, requires okada to go to makaranta, but these movements can be treacherous for him, even as a passenger:

"I use the street to go to makaranta using the motorbike. And the memory I have is one day when we were on the motorbike the driver was riding at a high speed that I couldn't even see the place I was going through. I was trying to tell him to slow down, but he was not minding me. In fact, near the bumper we all fell down."

In our group mapping workshop, many of the SOI students indicate the multiple locations of past car accidents, memorializing these instances of people being knocked down in different locations across the neighborhood. Each student uses a different marker color, and together they fill the map with varying colors of their situated memories of these accidents. Their stories show the street and the pavement as sites of danger and always-potential danger through accidents, where children like these SOI students can get hurt.

As Mariam shows us in her story, and Hiba in the following statement, children as well as adults have to watch the street, following not only traffic rules but also watching for vehicles who flout traffic rules: “So that day I was from the library and I witnessed an accident on the Kanda Highway,” Hiba begins, presenting her body map. “I was going home, and I witnessed an accident. A car knocked a boy. The boy too was [coming] from the library, but when he was crossing, he didn’t check, so he didn’t know whether a vehicle was coming.” Later in the group mapping workshop, she expresses her constant fear: “Every day when I’m passing, I don’t know if one day a vehicle can knock me down.” Her story demonstrates the ordinariness of these accidents, injuries, and threats. Her statement also echoes a statement by Larry, in describing the constant scanning and learning that residents must employ as part of Nima’s programming, which in this case means a constant attunement to potential dangers. From this accident, Hiba learns that she cannot just depend on the traffic rules, crossing the street at a red light. She must also check for cars who ignore the traffic rules, an extra step of vigilance that employs to try to keep herself safe.

The streets become dangerous spaces colored with the multiple memories of these accidents, the always happening of these accidents, the close calls, and the future accidents to come. The proliferation of dangerous driving, road accidents, injuries and lost lives transform the material street space into a site of simultaneous vitality and death. The SOI students’ photographs, drawn images, and words describe myriad ways in which individuals and groups - most particularly adults - situate themselves at the street and its edges, especially street hawkers and vendors who operate at the pavement and street. These individual practices each transform streets into communal places of operation and gathering for commercial, social, and cultural life. Cumulatively, they normalize the occupation of these streets, and the narrowing and blockages of these street spaces once designed for vehicles and sidewalk pavements for pedestrians. The young people express the ways residents’ street and sidewalk pavement operations normalize the risk of accidents as everyday occurrences in the lives of those who inhabit and use these spaces. In these spaces where cars, motorbikes, street vending, playing, socializing, and pedestrian movements teem together, the street becomes an everyday site of real and potential physical harm, injury, close calls, and death. The young people articulate their existence on the receiving end of an onslaught of behaviors: adults whose occupation of streets and sidewalk pavements push them out of the space, cars and motorcyclists that take up the street and might drive haphazardly, including by ignoring road laws, to the detriment of pedestrians, vendors, and those who find themselves in these places. From these experiences, which circulate with

them as they pass along the streets, they also imagine together opportunities for safety on these roads.

Safety on the road

In the previous two sections, I share how Mariam and the SOI students enumerate and describe ways that street vendors' presence and drivers' rough riding in the streets and sidewalk pavements threaten and make real accidents and injuries, displacing children with the threats and realities of bodily danger and harm. In this section, I read together three analytical themes produced by the SOI students that I interpret as overlapping interventions toward safer streets and sidewalk pavements: "how government should solve vending problems in Nima," the "ways of preventing accidents in [their] community," and "activities that prevent road accidents" (SOI students, first and second analysis workshops). Through these themes, the children articulate from their lived experiences and assemble together spatial, social, and material interventions, desires and demands. They imagine traffic lights, bumpers, overheads, footbridges, road signs, zebra crossings (pedestrian crosswalk), the presence of police officers and traffic conductors whose watchfulness and actions could deter traffic offenders. They also imagine how when introduced, these bodies, materials, and forces could shift and remake the community spaces of Nima's streets and sidewalk pavements into safer, more care-filled places for them to inhabit. In addition, they inspire, inform, and learn from each other in mapping and storying these possibilities.

In the group mapping process, both Jordan and Fati create market parks as neighborhood improvements. They imagine built structures that house the numerous vendors, their goods, and their commercial activities, and they speculate relocating vendors from streets and pavements, opening up space in these community spaces for children to walk along freely. Jordan points to his orange-colored circular structure, saying: "This one is a market park. Inside they sell meats, foods, fruits, rice, onions, peppers, carrots, etc. I do not want them to be selling foodstuffs on the street, otherwise it can cause road accidents." His market park features two large dustbins in front, each with an individual disposing of their rubbish in the dustbin. From the wide entrance, numerous vendors and their pointed stalls are visible.



Image 52. Market Park, by Jordan in the group mapping workshop (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

In another part of Nima, Fati illustrates her own market park on the group map. This one is behind the existing Nima Market, and Fati situates this intervention through her own felt experience of navigating streets and sidewalk pavements on busy Wednesday market days. On these days, Fati describes, the street vendors teem the street, and their crowding activities make for difficult and uncomfortable passage. “We just need a market park,” she says. “We already have a market, but every Wednesday, you just won’t find the right place to pass. There are some places that if you’re wearing a nice dress, and in the market, we have some kayayei [porters who carry customers’ goods atop their heads] and they’ll just be pushing and hurting you.” Fati’s market park takes the form of rows of shops, located in close proximity to a new bus station and police patrol:



Image 53. Market Park, by Fati in the group mapping workshop (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

In the storytelling workshop, Jordan²⁹ works with Hamid,³⁰ Sheik,³¹ and Sulley.³² Together they expand on Jordan's original idea for a market park, but seem to take on board Fati's ideas, too. The boys' story describes Nima where "a lot of sellers who sell on the street, some of them are seriously injured... [and they] face many problems." The boys narrate how vendors' street presence contributes to accidents, and their narrative relocates all of the vendors to a market park: "All of the problems they face in Nima Market is all about sacking them getting a new place for them...Others too must be sacked from the pavement and the different places because it is meant for pedestrians to walk on it." The former vending spaces are made into a "small space on the pavement to build a bus-stop, because

²⁹ Jordan's self-introduction: "I am a human being. I am a boy. I am 13 years old. I am in class 6. I attend [school]. I am a Christian. I like drawing." (individual writeup, February 2020)

³⁰ Hamid wasn't able to return his exam; he plays football with his friends, likes to learn and perform rap music and dance, and he is Muslim.

³¹ Sheik's self-introduction: "I am a human being and I am also a student...I am a male. I am 12 years old and in class 6 in [my school]. Am a Muslim and like to ride bicycle. And my skills to write. I respect my parents at home and also my friends." (individual writeup, February 2020)

³² Sulley's self-introduction: "I am a male and I am 15 years old. I attend [my school] and I am in Form Three (3). I am a Muslim and I like to read the Holy Quran." (individual writeup, February 2020)

the pavement is close to the street, so when they [vendors] sit at the bus-stop they can easily take a car to go to their destination.” In addition, the boys imagine, just as Fati did, that “you can find police around them [vendors] so that they should be safe.” The boys use the term “sacking,” the same term they use to describe their own roughly meted ejections from the schoolyard pitch where they like to play football, and an action that displaces them to an uncompleted cement building (described in Part 2 of this chapter). Fati, Jordan, Sheik, Hamid, and Sulley imagine an infrastructural improvement for these sacked and relocated vendors, yet the boys’ repetition of this same rough process of sacking highlights the power dynamics that they experience and would imagine redeploying toward others as means of shaping community space. The histories of colonial racialized dispossession, of street vendors, hawkers, and others is frequently reproduced in the present through AMA demolitions, evictions, and sacking practices (Fält, 2016; Gillespie, 2016). In contemporary Nima and throughout Accra, these planning practices not only normalize dispossession, but can also foreclose the full imagination of relations and possibilities for space in which to “find ways to imagine a future that is free...in terms of spatial practice” alongside “the necessary vocabularies needed to articulate these visions” (Lambert & Matsipa, 2020)

I want to further complicate these seemingly straightforward desires that the SOI students vocalize toward relocating the vendors to fixed market structures, and thus spatially separating themselves from these vendors. Continually throughout the research process, the SOI students point to their deep relations with vendors and their food activities. Within the research process, particularly in the body mapping and group mapping workshops, nearly every SOI student mentions a vendor (or vendors) with whom they hold a meaningful social relation, and which provide the children with some of their favorite meals, snacks, friendship, and contribute to their households’ earnings. These social connections demonstrate how even within the environment that the vendors’ activities produce as dangerous (and thus, in certain ways inhabitable in particular ways for children), these vendors also in other ways nourish and sustain them.

Nearly all of the students share stories of their experiences being sustained and building social relations with the many food vendors who operate at the neighborhood’s streets, sidewalk pavements, lungus, and open spaces. This aligns with research that demonstrates how in urban Ghana households of all income classes consume street food, particularly working-class households (Mensah et al., 2013). For example, Nusrat shared her early morning errands to collect koko, a hot peppery drink, for her younger brother (a thick drink made with fermented millet in a

process that traces back to Hausa migrants who first introduced the drink here in Accra, where a vendor expertly spoons the steaming hot, cream-colored liquid into a plastic sachet, then twists the top into a tight knot to seal it, then places it inside another plastic bag for takeaway). She also mentions her afternoon hangouts with a female friend tasked by the mother to help sell waakye from a kiosk at the pavement, and their chatting between orders as her friend assembles this northern Ghanaian dish.³³ Joshua names the Indomie vendor who sets up her kiosk by 3 o'clock each weekday afternoon at the sidewalk pavement near his home, and who makes the noodle dish just the way he likes. Hamid mentions that he normally buys food on the pavement from a street vendor on his way to school. Jordan mentions that he likes to buy white rice from a vendor on the street near his home, and Sulley says that he buys his favorite dish, jollof rice, at the street. Fati mentions that she always eats her mother's fried yam, which her mother sells at the street near their home. For Hiba, when she finishes her studies at the local library, she likes to get something to eat from the nearby street vendor. Sheik's mother sells porridge, his favorite breakfast food, on the sidewalk pavement, and he buys another one of his favorite foods, rice, at the streetside. Tanko always keeps a bit of money with him to buy his favorite snack, meatpies, at the street. These relations, connections, tastes, affinities, and sustenance orient the SOI students to particular vendors and the particular community spaces these vendors occupy. The affordability and convenience of accessing street food contribute to why many individuals, including children, purchase from street vendors (Mensah et al., 2013).

The children also imagine improvements to the dangerous driving activities that produce everyday threats in the streets. To address threats and realities of road accidents, the children imagine ways to smooth out and slow down the "rough riding" of motorists and enable their safe passage along and across streets. From their everyday experiences, knowledges, and fears within the streets and sidewalk pavements, they produce ideas for constructing bumpers (also known as speed bumps, speed humps, or speed breakers). Many of the SOI students identify and map these bumpers across the group map of neighborhood improvements. "I want the AMA [Accra Metropolitan Assembly] to put bumpers, because the motorboys are riding their motors roughly on the street," says Hamid, pointing to the orange bumpers he colors along one road. Salam, who also colors in this same intervention in another area, says, "sometimes the motos [motorbikes] go too fast...If there's a

³³ This northern Ghanaian meal is a heavy, buffet-style dish composed of a base of beans and rice, with the optional add-ins of spaghetti noodles, fried fish, meat, wele (cow skin), boiled egg, fried plantain, diced vegetables, tomato stew, gari, and peppery shito.

bumper, it will slow down the street.” Fati colors in a bumper like Hamid, and she makes an intimate connection between an existing issue in her area of Nima and her desire for this improvement. She points to a bumper she has added to the map, saying:

“And here is a street bumper [in my area] ...It’s a new street, actually, but we need bumpers and street lights there. Because that place, it’s a community street, and the boys nowadays, every boy wants to have a bike. So, they just go in and sometimes you have some ceremonies on that street. It [street ceremonies] started since ages ago, before they even thought of doing the street. So, they’re going to just drive there and the woman sitting in the street, having whatever event they’re having, they will just crash them. These days we don’t have good boys, they’re just bad boys...So we need to have street bumpers and street lights. We have some bumpers, but it’s not plenty. We need more. Because that area is just like, it’s just full of people.”

The children not only identify similar interventions, but they also learn and inspire each other’s imaginings. Fati colors in two street lights, a traffic light, and a traffic conductor in her area, which Abigail takes up in her own short story. In the mapping workshop, Abigail installs a zoo with “snakes, lions, and giraffes...something Nima kids have not seen before,” she says, and a dustbin, and a zebra crossing (pedestrian crosswalk). “Here in this street, we need a zebra crossing because there is road, and there is road, and there is road, and when you’re crossing, a car just knocks you down and you can become hurt,” she says. She locates her zoo, dustbin, and zebra crossing close to Abdallah’s new NGO for children, and after Abigail, Widad uses pink to color in a nearby playground area.

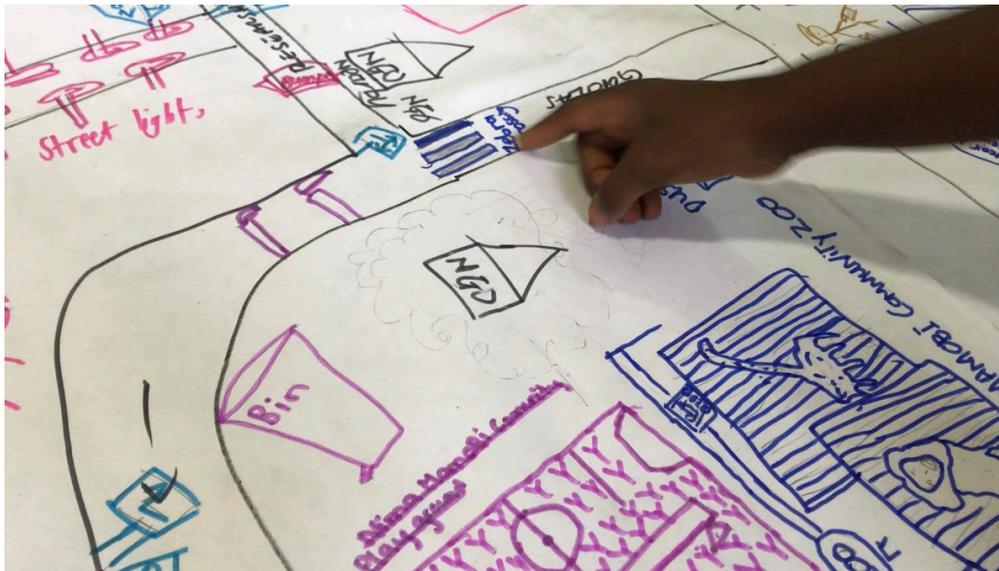


Image 54. Abigail points to zebra crossing she contributes to the group map (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

In the storytelling workshop, Abigail³⁴ writes a short, one-paragraph story that she entitles “Bumpers and Zebra Crossings.” In Abigail’s story, like in Fati in her group mapping contributions, bumpers, zebra crossings, road signs, and traffic lights are new components to community space that either do not presently exist or are few in number:

With the absence of bumpers, zebra crossings, road signs and traffic lights, there is the presence of road accidents, reckless driving and riding, traffic jams, and difficulty when it comes to crossing the street. With the presence of zebra crossings and bumpers, crossing the street becomes easy because cars slow down when they get closer to the bumpers and zebra crossings. This reduces the rate of knocking down pedestrians crossing the street. With the presence of traffic lights it minimizes the traffic jams in Nima. Road signs, bumpers and zebra crossings help reduce road accidents.

These material interventions, the bumpers, zebra crossings, road signs, and traffic lights are thoughtful and caring interventions that the children map and story across their neighborhood, like the dustbins they map and I discuss in the first part (Part 1) of this chapter. In addition, I want to highlight how Abigail and others anticipate how

³⁴ Abigail’s self-introduction: “I am 11 years old. I am in Class 6...I am a Christian. I like dancing and writing. I like fufu with light soup. I am fair in complexion. I am 4 feet tall.” (individual writeup, February 2020)

these new components might shift the potential of drivers of motorbikes and cars in these community spaces, remaking these spaces as habitable places for children so that, as Abigail writes, “crossing the street becomes easy.” Yet, Fati points out for her area that these motorbike riders are “just bad boys,” and her statement reminds me to reflect on these as ever-shifting relations of these assembling bodies, forces, and affects from which community space is always emerging (McFarlane, 2011; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). These material interventions, when in place, produce a new assemblage, but would not fix in place how all of these human and non-human elements relate. Rather, it is possible that when the bumpers, traffic lights, zebra crossing, and other interventions are put into place, that they would disrupt the behavior of these “bad boys” - and others - slowing and bringing them to a stop. Perhaps then, in response and through shifting relations and movements, these drivers might also find and make ways *around* these new elements in new ways: rather than permanently altering their behaviors, they might absorb these elements and forces into their movements and practices, continuing to make community space. Such has been the case with existing bumpers along Oku Street, where I saw time and time again motorbikes slow down as they approached, passed over, and then sped up again for the rest of the length of the street. Drawing on Fati’s complaint reminds me that these human and nonhuman relations at the street and sidewalk pavement are always in flux.

I also want to reflect here on how the children produce speculative ideas, interventions, and stories through deep relation. This is a relation between their individual, shared, and diverging experiences, memories, dreams, fears, their human bodies, and the nonhuman bodies (such as the cars, motorbikes, vendors’ kiosks and goods, the street pavement, and cement) that shape their community space experiences. From their own individual and overlapping lived experiences, shared in response, in dialogue, and at times complementing one another, the children produce individually and/or group-authored narratives and interventions that are always situated within these relations. In this way, they work together, even when working individually, and they build from and with each other’s inspirations, shaping critical interventions through speculative maps and stories. This is a relational knowledge sharing and building process, where “knowledge comes from the people’s histories, stories, observation of the environment, visions, and spiritual insights...out of the people’s relationship and interaction with their particular environments” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 117). I think of this as a relational process in which the SOI students learn together by assembling their bodies, shared experiences, colored markers, the large white map, their colored-in locations, interventions, and ideas. These workshop moments become spaces of encounters, with the children

bent over the group map, presenting, and listening to each other, agreeing or distinguishing, and including each other's experiences in the stories they produce. This process of collaboration increases their capacities to imagine. In this way, their learning from and with each other is "not only about the acquisition of existing knowledges and skills but also about inventing new ways of relating to the world and composing its materials (Kullman, 2015, p. 263).

Mariam and Abigail's stories and the collective story produced by Sheik, Hamid, Jordan, and Joshua are relationally and co-created forms of speculative narrative that "situate Black childhoods in places...in ways that unsettle deficit or absented depictions of Black children" of Nima neighborhood (Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017, p. 106). Mariam's story is not only produced in deep relation with her own PhotoVoice images and captions, where she focuses on a yoghurt seller, a beer seller, a cassava vendor, and a yam vendor operating at the street and pavement. In the group mapping session, it is both Tanko and Mariam who discuss the need for overheads. Tanko points specifically to the dangers of the motorbike riders, drawing on his own lived experience of viewing a boy hit by a motorbike not far from the SOI office. "There must be an overhead because some of the motor riders ride their motors anyhow. They can knock a pedestrian," he says in the group mapping workshop. These becomes a feature in Mariam's speculative story: She narrates how her protagonist, a 15-year-old boy named Faisal, imagines a pedestrian footbridge that "he could have used...to reach his mother," instead of crossing the street and experiencing an accident due to a reckless motorbike rider. Tanko and Mariam's experiences, insights, contributions, and visions entangle and inform each other in ways that produce a story more expansive than their individual potentials. This demonstrates that in addition to the children's situated experiences of community space being entangled with the entirety of human and nonhuman elements, their capacity to imagine and envision interventions also takes place in deep relation with each other, each other's experiences, and imaginings.

Part 4:
“Solutions” by Fati³⁵ and Tanko:
Violences and imagining safety within community space

Fati’s self-introduction

“...the only thing that makes me unique is my character and confident, am a girl of her own capacity; am 17, am in SHS Form 2 home economics, am a Muslim and my hobbies are singing and dancing, drawing, poem and storywriting are my skills.”

(individual writeup, February 2020)

Tanko’s self-introduction

“I am 14 years old, I am in JHS 1 in school. I am a boy (male). I like dancing, football, reading, learning. I also have the skill to draw, the skill to play football, I have the skill to dance, etc. I have a tribal mark on my face which shows who I am and where I am coming from. I am a Muslim.”

(individual writeup, February 2020)

“Solutions” By Fati and Tanko

Far away on the streets of Nima lived two siblings and they go by the name of Tanko (TK) the first child and Fati the second child. They are both hardworking and respectful so as their friends they made, but as Nima kids they are being criticized at school due to the violent populations of Nima. To be frank, that’s what makes them popular.



³⁵ This is Fati, the SOI student, not to be confused with Fatimatu, the SOI team member.

Image 55. Story characters Fati and Tanko (TK) (Sketch by Fati and Tanko)

It's four o'clock in the morning and Mrs. Sani woke Fati and TK. She told Fati to go and sweep the compound house and TK to take his bath. As Fati was sweeping, she heard a noise from afar. She listened deeper and it was a lady's voice. She was calling for help in the lungus, close to Fati's house. Quickly, Fati ran out to help the lady. Then she saw a man running. It was an armed robber, but too late the man was gone. Suddenly, her mom shouted her name and she entered the house and told her mom everything.

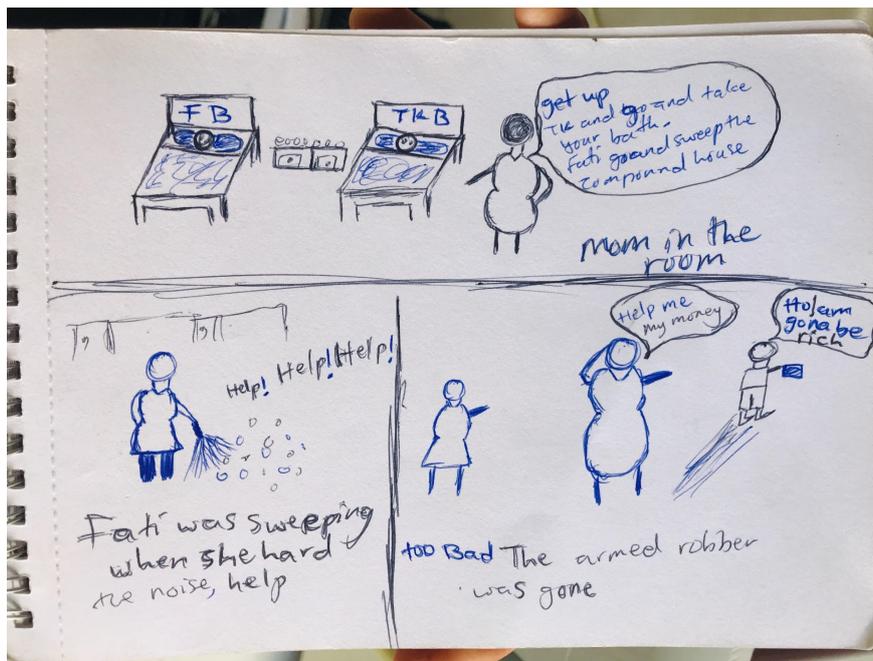


Image 56. Early morning armed robber in the lungu (Sketch by Fati and Tanko)

At 6:00, both kids took off for school. On their way to school, they saw people beating a woman to death on the pavements four blocks to Fati's school.

"Hi! TK aren't you late for school?" Tanko turned and it was Amina, she was also on her way to school.

"Amina what happened? Why are they beating the woman? They will kill her," TK asked.

"It better they kill her, this is the fourth time she kidnapped a child and was caught," answered Amina.

The three friends had nothing to talk about so they continued their journey to school. At school, teacher Esi was the first teacher in class to teach English on Monday mornings, and today's topic was essay writing.

She told us a story as an example and it was about an asthmatic patient who lived with his sister and brother. His sisters and brother were drug addicts. One day after a long day from work he came home to meet his siblings smoking in the living room. He begged them to go out and they refused, so he decided to go out where the air was smooth and fresh. Suddenly, his brother pushed him to the ground and forced him to smoke. He started breathing heavily then died. The gateman saw what happened and reported them to the police. The teacher's story moved everyone in the class. And she grouped them in three. Fati, TK and Amina were in one group and their story was to write about the prevention of dangers and criminal activities in their community. They remembered what happened that day and they all brainstormed about the solution.



Image 57. On the way to school and school work (Sketch by Fati and Tanko)

They started with early morning robbers and their solution was to have a police patrol in the community at all times. Then neighborhood watch to unmask kidnapers in the community, as for people who abuse themselves with drugs, they must be educated on the dangers on them and the innocent. And if they don't have a listening ear, then the police can interfere in the issues, for everyone to live healthy and happy. For as

a healthy mind comes from a healthy body, to develop Nima as a better place.

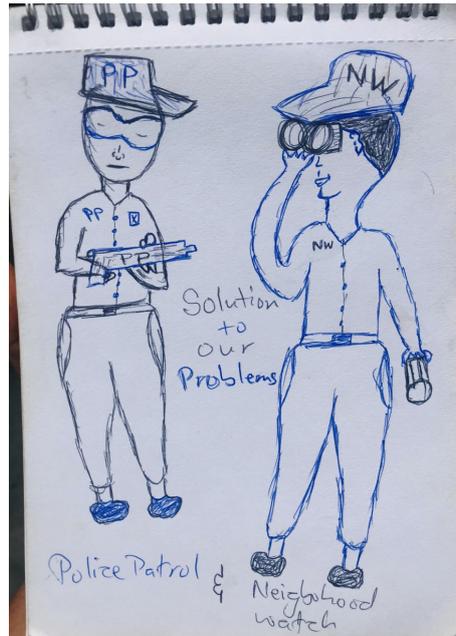


Image 58. Police patrol and neighborhood watch (Sketch by Fati and Tanko)

In this part (Part 4), I work through Fati and Tanko’s story alongside the SOI students’ own themes of quotidian violences and threats of kidnapping, which inform their avoidance of some lungu spaces. I focus on three themes that the SOI students generated in our participatory analysis workshops: kidnapping, avoiding lungus, and making spaces for young people. Ultimately, I draw from Fati and Tanko’s story that the spatial practice of gathering, assembling, and coming together provides protection for children, and I explore the ways we do this, taking what we learned together in the research process, as discussed in the three previous part of this chapter, to conceive, plan, and produce our community event in the street as a collective, shared space, produced through care for children that enables them to embody other ways of being in community space.

Violences and kidnapping

In their short story, Fati and Tanko mention how Nima’s residents are stereotyped as “violent populations.” While they recognize the realities of everyday urban violences that do take place in their neighborhood, they also differentiate themselves as individuals who are “hardworking” and “respectable.” I connect Fati and Tanko’s story to the theme of “violence” that the SOI students constructed in our analysis workshop to describe their own realities of everyday brutalities in community space, including the threats and realities of kidnapping. These violences and the threats of these violences elicit the young people’s fears and avoidance of

particular community spaces. Fati and Tanko’s story, along with the other SOI students’ contributions on fighting and kidnapping in their neighborhood illustrate the assemblage of physical violences, within the expansive racializing assemblage shaping these children’s less-than-human experience in community space.

It is in our body mapping and group mapping workshops that the SOI students describe the multiple forms, places, and situations of violence that take place in community space. First, they locate their observations, memories, and fears around fighting in their neighborhood as embodied knowledge that is shaped by and shaped their community space experience. “People always fight and quarrel in the streets and in the lungus,” states Abdul Majeed in presenting his body map. “I was sent one day to go and buy food in my house to use the lungu. Whilst there I heard a loud noise from one end of the lungu. It was a fight between two guys, and I was afraid to go by because they were using weapons.” He moves to another part of his body map and continues. “And here, I saw two boys fighting there on the street by the gutter. They were fighting and many people were crowded there.”

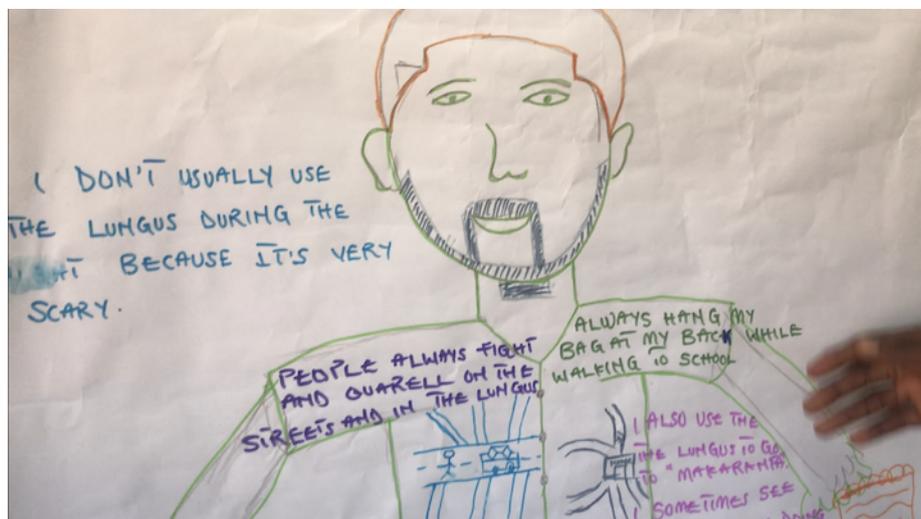


Image 59. Abdul Majeed presenting his body map (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

Abdallah, in presenting his body map, shares a similar observation of fighting at a schoolyard pitch where he would go to watch boys play football: “One day when I was coming from the park, I saw people fighting,” Abdallah says. “They were fighting mercilessly. They were fighting with cutlasses [large metal knives]. Before I could know, one was hurt and he was rushed to the hospital, and this was on the pavement.”

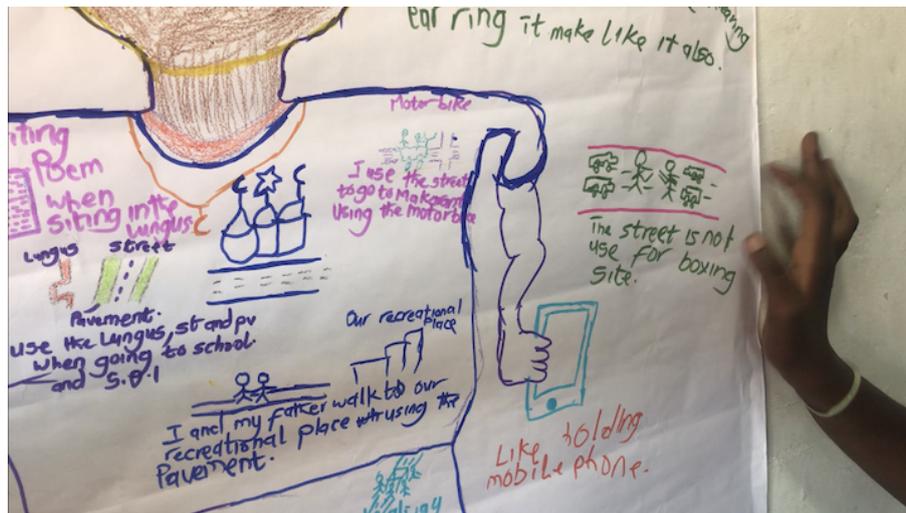


Image 60. Abdallah presenting his body map (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

As students in turn share the no-go areas that they mark out on one of the group maps, I begin to see the pervasiveness of fighting in community space more clearly, and I learn from how they articulate these everyday violences they observe regularly. Their multiple stories, sharing individual embodied experiences, blend and weave together the ways in which the children behold violence erupt. “I once saw two men fighting in the lungu,” says Emmanuel, pointing to two stick figures he drew on the group map. “And here, in front of my house, there’s a bench where old men usually who sit there, and they don’t want children to come. Sometimes they smoke there, and they’ll be shouting. In front of my house, I witnessed two men who were also bad thieves on the street fighting and then a man came and hit them.” Nusrat shares her story of boys fighting with knives; Abdallah describes how street violence disrupts and stalls vehicular traffic, and Hamid mentions that these street fights can also cause road accidents. The SOI students observe, remember, learn through gossip, and expect fights to break out in community spaces, and how these activities shape their experience of the neighborhood and its community spaces.

Another element of everyday violence that shapes the SOI students’ experiences is kidnapping, a reality and threat for children in Nima. The SOI students frequently discuss their fears of theft and kidnapping, that someone might steal them away from their home and family. “I don’t like passing in the lungu because it’s scary,” says Sheik in presenting his body map. “When I’m passing there, somebody can easily kidnap me.” His statement reveals the lungus’ dangerous potential, but as sites where he and other children must still pass through, perhaps out of necessity. “The kidnapers, mostly they stay in the lungus to kidnap children,” says Tanko in explaining his own body map. “The last time, there was some girl in Majeed’s [another SOI student] house who was kidnapped. Yes, I’m afraid, ‘cause it teaches

me a lesson,” he says. As Tanko mentions, the lungus become the sites where kidnappings take place, where children are targeted for kidnappings - in some cases, children they know.

Kidnappings in particular are “a common occurrence” in Ghana, where intense, publicized media coverage of children’s kidnapping and sale as part of human trafficking networks, forced labor, and ritual killings are frequently met with public disbelief, outrage (Adinkrah, 2018), despite long histories of this practice from domestic, trans-Atlantic, and trans-Saharan slave trades (Holsey, 2008; Hartman, 2007) to date. The threat that an adult would capture or lure a child away is a persistent and existential threat enabled by the closed, dark conditions of the lungu at night. Their experiences passing through these spaces are marked by intimate dangers, fears, and their growing knowledges about the potential assaults they might encounter. As Tanko demonstrates in his statement, these kidnappings happen to friends and neighbors; the stories become familiar as they circulate across the community through rumors and warnings. These emotions, knowledges, and memories work together to shape their expectations of this space and their limitations within this place. Tanko, Sheik and others must constantly learn from these experiences, building a geographic intelligence of the dangers surrounding them, and adapting their movements, choosing when and where and with whom to move to ensure their own safety.

In particular, night is when the SOI students fear being kidnapped if they pass through these spaces. In Fati and Tanko’s story, an armed robber attacks and steals from a woman in the early morning hours; by the time Fati emerges on the scene to investigate, the robber is nowhere to be seen, having escaped into the lungus in the still-dark morning. SOI students speak similarly about dangerous activities that happen in the nighttime. “The lungu at my area, it is dangerous at night because someone may kidnap you, beat you, and take your things away, and it’s not nice,” says Abdul Majeed during the group mapping workshop. The SOI students mention the multiple aspects that work together to enable their going unseen, unnoticed, and unattended to in these spaces, which portends and facilitates multiple threats of bodily harm. For example, Hiba states:

“I’m sometimes afraid to pass through the lungu because our community brothers have taken over the place. Some of the people in the community, they’ve been sitting in the lungu so that they’ll do bad things. Because when you’re in the lungu, nobody will notice you. Because in the lungu, there’s no light. So even if something bad is happening there, nobody will pay attention, because over

there, it's overcrowded and it's also like a slum...Some lungus are now unprotected for us, to be precise, the children, because it is not safe no more!"

For Hiba, it is the lack of light, watchfulness, and care by adults, whether parents, relatives, neighbors, or an existing police or community watch presence, that facilitates the opportunity for "bad things" to take place. Fati and Tanko frame police patrol and neighborhood watch as a solution for children, as two forms of adult presence and watchfulness over children in these spaces. The SOI students make these and other recommendations too, including the potential contribution of street lights in their areas, to improve awareness and surveillance for children. "Here is Research getting to Hollandias," Tanko says, situating his contribution. "They must put street lights there because in the evening there is too dark, they can rob you or kidnap you, especially children." Hiba also says:

"I will like police patrol too because in my area we're having some base and they don't do good things, they do bad things like stealing, smoking and me as a small girl, I can't go and tell them that what they're doing is very bad, they'll beat me. So, I want someone who is having power over them who can stop them from their bad things. I would like to invite the policemen in my community. They should come to my home [home area of Nima] so they can stop all the bad things. They should come there every evening. We should invite police in our area for safety."

The students articulate the way that activities become co-located together in place, as interconnected or reinforcing behaviors and dangers. They also link kidnapping to these multiple activities and threats already taking place. Sheik, Joshua, and Jordan articulate smoking and threats of kidnapping as co-located threats in the lungus, making a connection between those who smoke cigarettes and weed and would kidnap children. "I don't use the lungu where they smoke wee [weed]³⁶ or I do not use the lungu where people are there. I think they can kidnap me," says Jordan (body mapping). Joshua states these threats as prohibitive to their presence in the lungu: "You don't enter [the lungu] because someone can kidnap you easily, and there are weed smokers there" (group mapping).

³⁶ In Nima, many young people refer to weed (marijuana) as "wee."

Avoiding (some) lungus

These students express an inability to use the lungus, or some lungus, or some lungus at particular times, because of these very activities, which seem to build on one another. These young people, who would avoid encountering these activities, in turn avoid these spaces, where and when they can. They express an inability to use these spaces, and they illustrate these situated crimes and dangers together as “no-go areas” marked out together in a group map. These no-go areas form part of an affective, non-material geography, informed by histories of social interactions and fears that haunt these spaces. This shapes their situated understandings of where they can move, enter, inhabit, and dwell, where they cannot, and their subsequent movements in and through these spaces.

The SOI students share how the absence of protections alongside the presence of multiple violences structures their exposure and vulnerabilities in lungus. The numerous and connected network of lungus (alleyways) are essential pedestrian pathways, but also the settings for much of the danger and crime in Fati and Tanko’s story and generally in Nima. In a PhotoVoice image and caption, Tanko describes the lungu as a “close and a long place;” his words enable me to sense the lungu as a *close* place and also a *closed* place. In many lungus, homes and buildings, people, and activities exist in close proximity, and everyday activities and operations take up space and bump up against each other. Within this closeness, the nature of these activities and their proximities - smoking, engaging in sexual activities, kidnapping, robbing - might foreclose the possibility of children and young people’s safety, comfort, and protection.



Image 61. PhotoVoice image (above) and caption (below) by Tanko

“A lungu is a close and a long place. Many people take that as a fighting place. Some men in Nima take that place as a smoking base. I did not know any positive of lungu only negative. Some are chopping love [a sexual activity], kidnapping, robbing, etc.”

Fati, born in Nima, moves through space as a Muslim teenager and a Black girl and at different moments, she mentions specifically how her identity shaped her spatial experience.³⁷ On the day of our body mapping workshop, she wears a gray, white, and navy cotton cap to cover her hair, and she employs the idea of protection in two of my conversations with her about her spatial experiences. “I always wear mayafi or fula³⁸ before going to the public space. It protects me and gives me an

³⁷ In her self-introduction, Fati describes herself as both a Muslim and a girl; in her individually authored story (not included in this thesis because of space limitations, she describes herself as “Born in Nima, am Black and proud.”

³⁸ Mayafi and fula are types of loose, often embroidered, dress popular in Hausa cultures and also commonly worn by Muslim girls and women in Nima. Both cover the hair, neck, shoulders, arms, and most of the legs, leaving visible the face, hands, and feet.

identity that I am a Muslim,” she says, “because when I go out to the public space, people will know that ‘Oh, this girl, she’s a Muslim.’ They can see, without even asking what my name is or where I come from, they know that I am Muslim.” I consider different moments where I saw Fati or the other older Muslim girls - Nusrat or Hiba - arrive to the SOI office wearing mayafi or fula, and then upon entering, remove it, revealing their jeans and t-shirt they would be wearing underneath. Before leaving, perhaps to go run an errand for an SOI team member, or to go home, they would put on again their dress before going back out into the outer world. I gesture to Fati’s cotton cap, asking her how her head covering provides protection, and she responds: “It protects me from the bad eye, I mean, evil people and also demons. Because in Islam they say that females’ hair, it attracts demons. So, when we cover it, it protects us from them.”

These clothes and head covering are an important aspect of Fati invoking her embodied Muslim identity and her commonsense to orient herself as she moves through the public sphere. Fati’s mode of dress in the interior spaces of her home or even the SOI office (jeans and t-shirt differs with her head covered) from those she might wear in public (mayafi or fula), signaling how she mediates her own sense of comfort and protection in relation to her presentation of her body (Johnson, 2017). In the instances where Fati would wear mayafi and fula, she uses this dress as a protective boundary about her body and to fit comfortably into her exterior surroundings, a means of “corporeal willfulness” (Ahmed, 2014) that she operationalizes to make more room for herself in a community space of audiences, objects, and places.

Fati also extends this concept of protection to all objects within her field of movement in community spaces. “I go to makaranta on weekends by walking on the pavement,” she says. “And in front of our makaranta there is a traffic light, so it means that we are always protected.” I ask her if the protection comes from the traffic light, so that traffic will stop. “Yes, sometimes,” she affirms. “We also have some policemen who come and supervise the place even though there is a traffic light. So, I’ve never seen like, busy traffic on that street, and I’m perfectly safe - that’s the safest place, I think. It is for me.” She also protects herself through the spaces she chooses to move in or avoid. “I always take the path in the lungus because the lungus is far better for me,” she says. “Because when I’m walking on the street, the boys sitting along the street, they will just start calling me carelessly without knowing how I think or what I feel when they call me like that. It’s like I’m hiding myself in the lungus,” she says.

I read Fati's statements as describing the ways she employs her own bodily agency to shape the attention that she might attract to herself. Through her dress, she attempts to evade unwanted attention: the evil eyes, catcalls, and physical forms of harassment. She moves in and toward spaces where she welcomes the attention of authorities, those who protect the space through their presence in and surveillance. She walks in proximity to traffic guards who induce motor vehicles to follow street regulations. In doing so, she also demonstrates the complexities of moving in and through the lungu and other spaces. In the vast network of lungu spaces that knit together densely connected pedestrian pathways, Fati demonstrates that lungus are not wholly dangerous, and that within her area of Nima neighborhood that she moves through as a Muslim teenage girl, she is able to find safer spaces within the lungus as she moves between home, weekday school, makaranta, the market, the SOI office, friends' houses, and other meaningful locations.

There is no regular or consistent police presence in Nima, and when in their story, Fati and Tanko speculate how the police and neighborhood watch are the solutions that would make their areas safe. They describe "good" eyes and careful watchfulness over the children and young people in these spaces. This is reinforced by a statement from Fati, in one of her contributions to the group map:

"And here, neighborhood watch. In our community nowadays, I've been hearing some rumors of some child kidnappers in our area. A certain girl saw what happened, luckily she knew the boy, and he was like 'Come and help me, this woman is trying to do something!' Then everybody just came. So we actually need neighborhood watch."

These adults could unmask kidnappers, educate drug users, prevent or stop thefts, harassments, and kidnappings, all of which build fear for the SOI students. The children's statements illustrate that their safety is tied to a being together, including with the protections of adults, in lungus and other spaces. As Fati and Tanko write in their story and the children's statements indicate, it is this togetherness, an everyday watchfulness in which the children are looked out for, supports "everyone to live healthy and happy" in mind, body, and neighborhood. In the next section, I illustrate how our togetherness in the street shapes the space, which circulates with dangers and threats, is an experience that also finds ways to center their safety, as well as their joy and play.

Claiming space through our children's street event

When we (Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha, and I) ask the SOI students to imagine a format for sharing our research in the Nima neighborhood, the children choose for us to subvert these everyday power dynamics and experiential realities of displacement they regularly experience through a “tent in the street” event. In the format of a site-specific intervention, we claim the street in front of the SOI office for children on a Saturday morning and afternoon to share our research in community, create conversation, stir power dynamics, and create a (temporary) space for play within the community space (Reich et al., 2017; Kaye, 2000). We recognize and negotiate the assemblages of uncleanliness and waste, displacement, dangerous activities, road accidents, and violence which circulate in this community space, like the Nima gutter that runs along the street, and we inhabit these assemblages and produce together a site of gathering and play for the SOI students and other children. I read this event as one of SOI students' many “activities that happen on the public space,” which include “activities such as games, festivals, etc. and important things on the environment” (SOI students, analysis workshop, February 1, 2020). In this section, I focus on four aspects of this event: our struggles in claiming the street, reflections and responses produced by our event, and a focus on a small, meaningful moment in our event that demonstrates the production of joy through this temporary gathering.

We use various material obstacles to mark our claimed space (approximately 8x20 meters) as a “no-go” area for adults and vehicles, with mixed results. First, as Fatimatu, Mutawakil, and I set up the photo exhibition (a series of rows of the SOI students' printed photos, strung up using plastic laundry pegs and green rope tied to the metal poles of one tent), Fatimatu identifies and drags over a discarded wooden door to the edge of our space.



Image 62. Mutawakil sets up photo exhibition (Photo by Victoria Okoye)

Within moments, a motorcyclist approaches and swerves around the door, entering into our side of the tent and maneuvering out the other end. Fatimatu and I exchange a look, our eyebrows raised with surprise and recognition. We go back to work, and a few moments later, we hear a loud *crack!* as another motorcyclist drives directly on and over the door and zooms through our space. Continually during this setup and in moments during our initial event, we negotiate our claim for this space, using the door, plastic chairs, the tents, the event banner, and strung-up photos to obstruct passage. Continually, motorcyclists, street vendors, and pedestrians pass through. In these encounters, it is Tikas and Mallam Mutawakil, two SOI team members who are men and live in this area of Nima, whose authority in the space is most recognized and respected and so are most able to halt the motorcyclists, unlike Fatimatu and me. Yet even these they experience challenges and must use their physical presence, voice, and in one instance, physical force, to stop the motorcyclists (who are also young men and adult men).



Image 63. Men on motorbike pass through the event (Photo illustration by Victoria Okoye)

These experiences overlap with the SOI students' experiences concerning the ways adults refute their attempts to claim space and the ever-existence of danger in the streets. Our work requires vigilance and an attention to our exhibition setup while simultaneously keeping a keen awareness of our surroundings, like sounds of motorbike engines signaling an approach and our potential bodily danger. As Fatimatu describes in our reflective porch conversation (Chapter 3), it is from this experiences, where the motorcyclists do not mind us, that she feels neglected and less-than-human. As the SOI students, their friends, other children, and the invited guests arrive, we grow in our numbers. Once we begin, first introducing the event and then the SOI students' presenting their stories (a selection of which I have included in this chapter),³⁹ I notice many of the motorcyclists, vendors, and pedestrians start to pass *around*, rather than *through*, our space. Our gathering becomes not just tents, chairs, photographs, and bodies in the same space, but also a collective, unfolding eventful space through a shared air of attention, with multiple eyes and ears and human bodies turned toward a single speaker (Amin, 2015). Coinciding with this, our claim to the space becomes more widely respected, although never completely impermeable to these interruptions and disturbances.

Taking turns, the SOI students share their speculative narratives, poems, and concerns to the audience composed of their friends, neighbors, street vendors, passersby, authorities. Vendors operating in the area, many who are women, turn their attention to us between their customers. Passersby pause and listen before

³⁹ I include all of the SOI students' speculative stories in the Appendix.

continuing on their journeys. When Fati recites her (other) story and describes an armed robbery, shouts and yells emanate from the crowd: “Kidnappers, armed robbers, smokers everywhere. Am the victim at night singing ‘Oh, God.’ The gun is pointed at me. ‘Bring out everything you’ve got!’ I am dead and still breathing,” she exclaims.

We also invite Honorable Shareau Tajudeen, whom Larry and I interviewed (in Chapter 2), to provide a response to the students’ readings. It is Honorable’s statement, which is a direct reflection on and response to the students stories, that inserts the human into our conceptual frame for this research project, and demonstrates its connections to the stories the children produce. I presented this statement in the conceptual framework chapter (Chapter 3), and I repeat it here:

“All what the kids read, we are seeing it. Smokers are disturbing our community, and bad behavior is generalized in Nima community. We put politics in our activities...We can see the drain and the gutter not being covered, and cars knock down kids and the adults [in the street]. Ideally, pavements are meant for the pedestrian to walk over, but they have become business centers. What is happening? Are we not human beings? I went to Hamburg, I walked freely without fear. You can’t find rubbish on the street or anywhere, so why can’t we emulate them? Are we not the same flesh and bones as them?”

We transform the setup of the rented tents, chairs, exhibition to create the second part of our community event for children-centered play. Fatimatu, Larry, Mutawakil, Mustapha, Tikas, the children, and I reassemble the tents and the plastic fold-up chairs to one side of the street and into a long, ellipse-shaped formation (4x15 meters), which encloses us into a smaller open space that separates our event from the rest of the street. This (small) space spans half the width of the street and runs the length of three large white canopy tents. One long edge of our space lines up with the provisions shop where we buy snacks for our events, and here the DJ situates himself and his music equipment on the pavement. On the two shorter sides are the DJ’s speakers, the door, our event banner, and the photography exhibition. This arrangement leaves one long side of our space separated from the passage of cars, motorbikes, pedestrians, and hawkers by a row of white and red plastic fold-up chairs. This permeable barrier maintains the open-air feel of the space and our activities as easily viewable by the public, but also a proximity to the dangers and rough riding that circulate through the street space.



**Image 64. Arrangement of tents and chairs for children-only space of the community event
(Photo illustration by Victoria Okoye)**

Within this (small) space that we collectively claim for a limited time, the SOI students and other children choose to dance, stage physical competitions, and sit with friends. It is seventeen-year-old Fati who MC's the event with Tikas on hand to help run the activities, and in their games, the girls face off against the boys in contests of jumping rope and tug-of-war, and dancing competitions and performances, before the event morphs into a general, freestyle dance space. From our coming together in this smaller, but perhaps more easily protected space, there are multiple moments of collective and shared pleasure and joy that surge to the surface.

One moment is in the jumping rope competition, where two teenagers face off, and the way their competition draws the group in to produce a shared atmosphere of excitement. Usman goes first, and the children form a circle around him. Usman, smiling and confident, tilts his head upward as he makes fast, smooth jumps as the circle of children looks on. Some of their heads move up and down along with Usman, their mouths numbering his jumps along with Fati on the microphone. As his jumps accumulate, their excitement grows, and when he falters, tripping the rope on his foot, he laughs and swaggers to one side toward his friends. Fati's taunts followed him: "Ooooh! Somebody had 49!" she shouts to the crowd.

Immediately, the girls move forward toward Tikas in a throng of bodies, their hands extending toward him, who in the meantime has taken the rope from Usman and towers above them. Tikas holds the jump rope in his hand and above his head, and moves his long arms in wide circles, motioning for them to back up and give space. They continue to crowd around him, undaunted, and their pleas for the rope, which would mean they would jump next, are drowned out by the music.

“Ohh!” Fati exclaims into the microphone. “He only had 49! Who can break this record?” she asks the crowd of children again and again, hyping them up and throwing one of her hands in the air. The DJ transitions into the next song. “Girls! Who can break this record?” she asks. Tikas still holds the rope in the air, and the girls continue to crowd around him, demanding it.

“Who can break this record? 49!” Fati continues. Tikas hands the jump rope to a young girl, maybe 13 years, her head covered in white cap that she has matched by a white, oversized T-shirt. The girls bow outward, reassembling themselves into a circle to surround her.

“Can you break the record!” Fati exclaims. The question is for both this girl and for us the audience, challenging her, creating suspense. The girl laughs, and she turns her head in a circle. “49, break the record!” Fati challenges. The girl looks at Fati and nods her head. “Ok, let’s start,” Fati says, and the girl begins skipping with Fati counting along: “1, 2, 3, 4....” And the children settle down, ceasing their own movements in order to watch, all eyes on her and attention to each move. Her own eyes barely open, the girl jumps, and she matches her landings with the fast beat of the azonto music coming from the speakers. She reaches 20, and a small girl from behind also starts jumping along, synchronizing her jumps to the girl’s own. The music cuts off suddenly, but the girl’s jumps continue, unphased, and other girls’ voices join in Fati’s, raising up to fill in the sonic space. Their voices count along, drowning out everything outside the space: “30, 31, 32....” As they reach 39, another girl, seated behind in a chair, jumps up and starts jumping up along, too. As her jumps reached the 40s, more and more of the girls join her in excitement. They begin clapping and jumping along, synchronizing with her like a collective game of ampe. Even Fati, her two hands up in the air, is pulled into the excitement. As the girl’s jumps surpass Usman’s 49, the crowd of girls close in on her, dancing around her as she smiles and laughs. Tikas, laughing too, holds up her arm. The girls have won.



Image 65. The girls win the jumping rope competition (Photo illustration by Victoria Okoye)

Other such moments follow: When Emmanuel wins the push-ups competition, the children similarly gather around him, his friends pulling at him and helping him as he gets up, encircling him, hugging, tugging, smiling, laughing, and jumping up and on top of him. Emmanuel, laughing, is wrapped in friends' arms as they jump and laugh together in a tangled group. "Emmanuel wins," Fati exclaims into the microphone above their yells, "Emmanuel wins!" Their hands, legs, smiles and laughs connect them to each other, and Emmanuel's win is shared.



Image 66. The children celebrate Emmanuel's win in the push-ups competition (Photo illustration by Victoria Okoye)

In another moment, the children show off their dance moves, and shy, smiling Hamid's friends push him to the center. The music begins, a fast-paced trilling of

flutes, and I recognize it as the popular street dance song “Skopatumana” by Ghanaian musical artist Patapaa. Patapaa, an artist known for making up words in his musical stage performances, growls in Twi against high-pitched flutes. Like this artist, Hamid too launches into freestyle, and as the beats of drums and clanging of triangles join the flutes, Hamid’s shyness vanishes. His face takes on a serious twist, his eyebrows drawn down, his lips drawn together, and he swings his legs forward from his knees, his hands forward, pumping his arms. He mimics a boxer’s stance. He grabs his chest, moving his shoulders back and forth as he leans back. He bends down like an elderly person in pain, grabbing his lower back as he moves to the beat. The children laugh; a girl screams in laughter (as I do), others cry out in surprise at his comical performance and the paradoxical combination of his serious facial expression and wiry, twisted, exacerbated movements. Sitting girls point at him, laughing, pushing each other, and bringing their hands to their mouths. Two girls, laughing uncontrollably, run from one side of the circle to another, pointing at him, while others pull out their phones to capture the moment. One boy’s laughs bring him to the floor, and a street vendor, who has been watching and herself moving to the music, laughs out, grabbing her cloth tied around her waist and waves it up and down at him, a laud and salute to his hilarious efforts. “Aye!” Fati exclaims in Twi into the microphone, praising him. Suddenly, before we know it, just as quickly as he started, Hamid turns and runs out from the center to rejoin his laughing friends, who wrap their arms around him and pat him on the back.



Image 67. Hamid’s freestyle dance (Photo illustration by Victoria Okoye)

This event takes place within the different assemblages that shape the children’s community space experiences: the uncompleted gutter that runs behind the event, the threats and dangers of motorbikes and cars, the vendors, the displacements.

Their moves, of pleasure, laughter, play, delight in our small space rub up against the structural and interpersonal forces of government neglect, displacement, resource under provision, a historical trajectory, all of which assemble their everyday experiences of community space in Nima and Accra (Krishnan, 2019). It is also within these everyday assemblages that we/they shape a way of inhabiting community space for children that draws on the dominant spatial logics in Nima that typically displaces them, but also more, such as care, to make space. This event is a form of magic, an event we/they produce that is grounded in the children's own "constant learning, [their] constant search of opportunities to survive" to think with Larry, which we deploy in this research process, as Mallam Mutawakil defines, "to turn something possible [children's occupation of the street] into something possible."

To think with Honorable as well as Spillers (1987) and Weheliye (2014), these children's bodies bear the markings and felt experience of dehumanization, as they move through and exist with the uncompleted drain and open gutters, accidents, violences, and displacements, as well as the hurts associated with trying to find space for themselves in various community spaces. It is also through their bodies and their embodied expressions that they assert other ways of fully being. Through their bodies, dancing, jumping rope, laughing, hugging friends, they engage in the world by embodying these playful and creative moments in collective assembly. In this small time and space of taking over the street space (a small part of the street space), where these children move and deploy their bodies however they please, their unregulated movements operate in ways not expected of their existences. Their creative expressions, laughter, entangled arms, Fati's exclamations, their suspense, attention, push-ups, jumps, their celebrations, competitions, and each dance movement are an "intimate life unfold[ing] in the streets (Hartman, 2019, p. 6). Their coming together produce an air that is "alive with the possibilities of assembling, gathering, congregating" Hartman 2019, p. 8).

This (small) space of our community event, some 4x15 meters taking up half of the street space for a few hours, is beyond, even if only temporarily beyond, the violences, fears, threats, social regulations, and wider structures that discipline these children into less-than-human in their everyday life (Weheliye, 2014; Krishnan, 2019; Lancione, 2020). Here they are fully human, not via the logics of a westernized development trajectory predicated on urban improvements, but through their/our own careful, caring, collective, and creative expressions and deployment of magic. This (small) children-centered space of play, of push-ups, jumping rope, freestyle dancing, laughing, music, and tangling and sharing together

in this (small) ellipsis-shaped space is a “parenthetical present” where a temporary but meaningful sociality takes place:

“[It] is not a vacant, uniform, or universal future that sets in motion liberty but rather the future as it is seen, felt, and heard from the enfolded parenthetical present of the oppressed, since this group’s NOW is always already bracketed (held captive and set aside indefinitely) in, if not antithetical to, the world of Man” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 138)

In this parenthetical present is a form of magic driven by a “politics of life” wherein they/we collectively shape other experiences of human beingness that center and orient toward this world on their own terms, and pleasure, joy, play made possible through collective gathering, attention, and care that break through the status quo - this is a “about re-arranging [things] in ways that are able to sustain these lives *the way they wanted to sustain themselves*” (Lancione, 2020, p. 279, 282, author’s original emphasis).

In a neighborhood where these children and their access inhabiting community space is regulated in myriad ways, the coming together of this space draws on local spatial logics while also unsettling the fixedness of the city’s plans, designs, and ideas for urban modernity. Through our own assembling together as children and adults, with our research experiences and ideas, our rented tents, chairs, gray door, we produce a moment in which the children rearticulate the potential of the street space, through their embodied movement, felt experiences, and this atmosphere, all of which disrupts the normative ordering of modern space in Accra *and* the spatial programming of Nima (Krishnan, 2019, p. 2). It is in tracing these practices and embodied moments and movements as deliberate spatial operations of magic, that the small and deeply meaningful ways that these children reshape the city come into view.

Part 5:

Discussion:

Mapping the children's community space experiences through racializing assemblages, the human, and magic

In this chapter, I use the SOI students' speculative stories as my starting point for making connections between their lived experiences, elicited from our participatory, arts-based research workshops, our community street event, and which the children then organized into analytical themes in our collaborative analysis. Working from these analytical themes and within the space available in this thesis, I have traced four assemblages from which the children's experiences of community space emerge. In this discussion, I now return to the research questions, and I structure my answers and interpretations from this collaborative investigation on children's embodied experiences and their practices of inhabiting community space in two parts, in response to the two research questions:

- RQ1** How do children articulate their everyday embodied experiences of community space in Nima?
- RQ2** How do children in their practices of inhabiting community space in Nima practice, perform, and imagine other ways of being and doing outside of dominant spatial frames?

"They don't care": Children's embodied experiences of community space

I begin to answer the first research question by returning to 14-year-old Usman's contribution to the short story "The Drain," in which he describes Nima and its current conditions, saying: "The [Nima] drain is a very big-sized hole...People use it for their dumping sites. They dump all sorts of rubbish, and they don't care." These words of his, "they don't care," return me to the notion of care (and its absence), which is a central theme in the first part of this chapter. SOI team member Fatimatu first points toward care (or lack of it) as a way to think about the question of being human in our front porch conversation. "I will feel like, am I also not a human being? Because I'm being neglected," she says. It is following Fatimatu's direction that I notice how a lack of care pervades all of the children's narratives of their experiences in community space, a questioning of their fully human status. This lack of care and neglect also encompasses Larry's statement that Nima residents "have been marginalized for so many years" due to the government's discriminating choices in the allocation of infrastructure and services, and Mustapha's questioning as to how "the Blacks were nurtured." This lack of care is both structural and interpersonal, visible in the children's depictions of the Nima drain and gutters, left

uncompleted, that they carefully walk on or along and fear falling inside, alongside the infrequently collected rubbish waste, which obstructs their space. I see it through the absence of bumpers, zebra crossings, road signs, traffic lights at streets, which, as they describe, could prevent reckless driving, traffic jams, and accidents, threatening these children with injury and death on their everyday walks. A lack of care features in their descriptions of interpersonal relations with other residents, particularly adults and older youth, whose makeshift dumping practices contribute to a community space of environmental, health, and bodily hazard, who sack the children from spaces of play, leisure, and hanging out and shape the children's multiple and continual displacements. The children's memories and fears illustrate the dangerous activities at the street and sidewalk pavement, a lack of care that circulates with the children as they move through the neighborhood. Also within the lungus, where the children's fears and firsthand observations of violences of fights and kidnappings follow and threaten them, inhibiting their movements in the day and particularly at night.

Through their stories, memories, emotions, and imaginings, the children illustrate their predisposition, a particular and structured precarity, to corporeal harm and injury. To continue thinking along the line that Fatimatu provides, these experiences lead the children to *feel* that they are less-than-human. As they navigate uncompleted sanitation infrastructures to kidnappings, robberies, and harassment, smoking in lungus to rough riding motorcycles and cars in streets, from overcrowded markets, streets, and pavements, to their constant displacement from sites they seek for safety and recreation, the dangers and threats these children face are all around and ever-present. From experiences, they share their feelings of being scared, disturbed, threatened, of feeling bad and feeling unsafe and always in potential danger. So many of these structural factors, interpersonal realities and relations fail to recognize these children as human, and treat them as such, making them as out-of-place and shaping community space as uninhabitable, continually thwarting their capacities and abilities to exist - fully, safely, and joyfully.

The Nima elders' conversations contextualize the evolution of the neighborhood's material landscape. Their (his)stories describe how the neighborhood's increasingly built-up environment has been shaped predominantly through self-organized construction by adult residents and older youth, who take up and claim existing community spaces for building, extending dwellings and for commercial activities. In particular, as Hajia Mariam and Madame Abiba share with Larry and me, this leaves few spaces of play for children. The children in turn illustrate these processes through their own experiences. These children detail the myriad ways adults take

community space, and often at their own expense, because their access to space is regulated through adults' own usages. With the decreasing availability of community space and the interpersonal power dynamics, where, as Larry points out, "power respects power," it is children, who possess less physical, financial, political, and social authority, who are sacked from community space in a multitude of ways. This aligns with scholarship on children's relative subordinate status to adults in Ghanaian society (Adinkra, 2018), and the children confirmed this through an analytical theme that they produced, that "the child has less power [than older youth or adults] when it comes to using public spaces." These factors cohere into a spatial programming that disciplines children and their physical presence, bodies, movements, practices, and their bodies in community space. For example, past instances of violence, received, observed, even learned about secondhand, inform the children's knowledge of where they can and cannot venture, which spaces they can and cannot claim and when.

This lack of care is also relayed through the stereotypes and stigmatizations toward Northerners in Ghana that pervade the popular and political imagination about Nima and its residents. These have actively positioned the neighborhood and its residents as "other" and continue to define them as poor, violent, and criminal (Holsey, 2008; Bowles, 2021). As Larry and Fati make clear, and as the students attest in their own words, these stereotypes inform how Nima residents are framed, and this is part of the dehumanization projected onto Nima residents and children. This dehumanization spans the stereotypes that Nima children might face in school (as "violent populations," as Fati and Tanko write in their story), as well as the ways persistent government neglect, which structures their lack of adequate sanitation, among other concerns, in turn comes to define these children and how they see themselves in the world (known by the "filth of the gutters...and the buzzing of the houseflies and the smell of the feces in the gutters," in Usman's words). These stereotypes reproduce for Nima the derogatory stigmas and labels that persist concerning its large population of residents who come from northern Ghana and beyond, and the histories of slavery and colonialism which have positioned the neighborhood and its residents in subordinate status and in stark contrast to the modern, settled, and cosmopolitan status of Accra (Bowles, 2021).

As I mention in the conceptual framework chapter (Chapter 3), Weheliye uses the approach of racializing assemblages to interrogate racialization as "a conglomerate of sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans" (2014, p. 3). Within Ghana, as Bayo Holsey (2013) articulates, the racial projects of slavery and colonialism have produced "a hierarchy

of black people” with the “modern black identity” aspiring toward the white western European heterosexual bourgeois overrepresentation of the human and distanced from those, particularly Northerners, who bear the historical associations of slavery (Holsey 2013, p. 510). It is within this temporal, spatial, structural, and relational context that the children’s lived experiences bear witness to the continued efficacy of “the structures of violence erected from the past [which] organize the racial logics of the present” (Alexander & Powell, 2016, p. 255), which define and dehumanize their Black lives within the wake of transatlantic slavery and colonialism (Sharpe, 2016) through its articulations within the post-independent majority Black country of Ghana. The lack of care that the children describe, which structures, shapes, and would enclose their everyday experiences of community space, making them feel less-than-human, is a lack of care for their Black lives. “This is the afterlife of slavery,” writes Saidiya Hartman, in her book *Lose Your Mother*, which follows the Middle Passage home to Ghana’s nine slave routes and 50 slave-holding outposts, “skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment” (Hartman, 2007, p. 6).

This collaboratively shaped conceptual framing understands these children’s experiences, which are bound up with diverse human and nonhuman bodies, experiences, memories, threats, and potentials, as also bound up with the political violence of racial slavery of colonialism, and the structural and interpersonal violences within community space, which produces their experiences as less-than-human. It is in our collaborative analysis process that the children organize their own experiences into multiple and intersecting relations through which they understand and build meaning of their spatial experiences, which I in turn read as assemblages. They produce themes that put into relation different human and nonhuman bodies, their memories, fears, feelings, practices, ideas, and desires: on waste and cleanliness; on the way people use community space, adults overpowering children, and recreational and personal uses of space; on dangerous activities, road accidents, and road safety; and on violence, kidnapping, and which emerge as the major narratives in this empirical chapter. These themes, which I put into conversation with the statements made by Honorable Tajudeen (“Am I not a human being?”) and Mallam Mutawakil (“Ghanaians survive by magic”), and shaped in porch conversation with Mustapha, Fatimatu, and Larry, I also take care to explicitly map Weheliye’s (2014) concept of racializing assemblages to produce ways of understanding how children’s experiences emerge from these relations and trajectories of neglect and the uneven development of Accra.

Learning from children's other ways of being

Moving now to the second research question, the SOI students' stories demonstrate the multiple and varied ways in which waste, littering, pollution, dispossession, dangerous road activities, accidents, and violences do circulate through the Nima neighborhood and their lived experiences to shape community space. But so too, they show us, does life, which is in the vast field of magical operations that these children implement, in learning, scanning, and imagining within their environment, and gathering, moving, hanging out, and playing together, to draw on Mallam Mutawakil. I read their experiences using the concept of the uninhabitable (McKittrick, 2013; Simone, 2019) to recognize the realities that shape their play, and also to turn my attention to the children's practices of plotting the use of community space, even for only a finite period of time, which these scholars in their writings and the SOI students in their practices use to gesture toward other ways of understanding and relating to space. This is attending to the "existence of alternative modes of life alongside the violence, subjection, exploitation, and racialization that define the modern human" (Weheliye, 2014, p. 1-2), a demand at the heart of Black Studies scholarship. Here I distinguish my approach and our learnings from children's geographies scholarship I've encountered focusing on African cities, which position children as "simultaneously victims and agents" of change (Diouf, 2003, p. 5) and as "both makers and breakers of society" (Honwana and De Boeck, 2005, p. 2), who subsist in and resist against dominant political, economic, and cultural structures and forces. Rather, the learnings from this research show these children, who lack resistance as a tool at their disposal, employ other modes of action and imagination, therefore responding in different ways to the circumstances of their environment.

In the way McKittrick (2013), drawing on Wynter, describes the value of plotting for the enslaved individuals on the plantation who took plots of earth and transformed them into gardens for producing nourishing food, and those who used the discursive location of the page as a generative site for self-invention, so too do these children. They plot spaces of play, laughter, and pleasure, producing "loopholes of retreat" in the last places, the least places, people would expect (Jacobs, 1861, p. 173). These inventive moments that the children produce - coming together to play, hang out, chat, to make fun of each other at their bases, at the front of a closed shop, in the lungu, in leftover open spaces and in uncompleted buildings, in the spaces of their compounds, mapping dustbins and safety in their neighborhood, producing speculative narratives, dancing in the street in the space of our community event - emerge as the multiple ways the children practice and imagine extending beyond their current circumstances. I map these children's

experiences through the concept of racializing assemblages, and note where Weheliye writes, describing the title of his book⁴⁰:

“I use the phrase *habeas viscus* - ‘You shall have the flesh’ - on the one hand, to signal how violent political domination activates a fleshy surplus that simultaneously sustains and disfigures said brutality, and, on the other hand, to reclaim the atrocity of flesh as a pivotal arena for the politics emanating from different traditions of the oppressed. The flesh, rather than displacing bare life or civil death, excavates the social (after)life of these categories: It represents racializing assemblages of subjection that can ever annihilate the lines of flight, freedom dreams, practices of liberation and possibilities of other worlds” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 2).

The children share their experiences of being neglected, sacked, hurt, feeling threatened and scared within community space, and these their realities overlap with each other, demonstrating the waves of trauma, violence, and hurt that take shape in their everyday experiences of community space. Yet, I take care to avoid “too readily accept[ing] our current racializing order of things as inevitable rather than as a set of sedimented political relations” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 67-68). As it is from this very context that the children not only assert their humanness - “I am a human being,” each writes Jordan, Sheik, and Joshua to introduce themselves in their own self-introductions - but also gesture toward their own ways of being human. Even when stereotyped, designed, treated less-than-human, they gesture toward other ways of being human that fundamentally undo the shackles of Man that Wynter (2003) illustrates we hold ourselves to. Therefore, following Weheliye, I orient toward a future that is now, where their human beingness is not tied to a completed drain, or improved transportation infrastructures, or increased police presence, or paved lungus, but rather is already lived within their constant relationality and care at the core of their own enactment of being human, and experienced concretely through the children-centered space in our community event. I frame the ellipses-spaced space and the children’s moments and movements within it as “the enfleshed parenthetical present...since this group’s NOW is always already bracketed (held captive and set aside indefinitely) in, if not antithetical to, the world of Man” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 138).

⁴⁰ The full title of the book is *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*.

It is in these ways that these SOI students, within the everydayness of their racialized circumstances of enclosure and displacement, also learn from their environment - and from each other - ways of embodying a livingness such that they exist within these circumstances but also extend beyond these very enclosures, displacements, and the materially under-resourcing of Nima neighborhood that we might so easily use to define (and confine) them. Through our porch conversation, Mustapha, Fatimatu, Larry, and I locate these children's practices of claiming, occupying, and using community space within the wide constellation of social and spatial strategies that Nima residents as Black people deploy for struggle, survival, and to thrive within the dire circumstances produced by a dominant state and its exclusionary governance (Amoo-Adare, 2019; Bledsoe, 2019; Ogunyankin, 2019; Hunter et al., 2016). It is from the grounds of uncompleted sanitation infrastructures, underprovisioning of services, rubbish dumping, displacements, dangers and violences that the children imagine, plan, and enact embodied practices of care for themselves and others: such as through their attentive practices of cleanliness and mapping dustbins and street bumpers. In speculative narratives, they imagine themselves as the solutions, interventions, and catalysts who inspire and initiate and do change in their environments. Here, I also critically distinguish between these research learnings and scholarship on children and youth geographies that asserts that from children and youth's exclusions from power, authority, and socioeconomic opportunity they become deeply associated with violence and criminality, becoming threats to society (Diouf, 2003). These learnings demonstrate the ways that children also turn to acts of care in response to their marginalized circumstances.

Critically, these enactments of care are made with others. It was with respect to the SOI students' speculative interventions to address street vendors and motorcyclists' dangerous activities in the roads that I notice how the children learn from, inspire, and work together in formulating speculative futures. Here I attune to their ways of listening, learning, and working in relation with each other's experiences, and I notice that the interventions that they produce are frequently a coming together of ideas, experiences, and also always much more than what any of them might have envisioned if working on their own. To turn back to community space, this synergy is a fundamental, and relational element that demonstrates that togetherness, collaboration, gathering, and cohesion in enacting care become essential to the children's spatial experiences and their own practices. This is in the way that Abdul Majeed imagines a community park becoming possible through the communal efforts of residents; that Emmanuel, Tanko, and Usman speculate covering the Nima drain through community coming together; that Fati and Tanko

position nighttime safety for children in the lungus made possible through community watch and police presence; that the children learn from and inspire each other in shaping these and other speculative contributions. Their contributions involve coming together toward a shared purpose, and it is their coming together through “complex collaborations” that sustains them (Simone, 2019, p. 18). This also reflects children’s geographies scholarship on the critical importance of children building social relations, interdependence, and friendships with each other (Horton & Kraftl, 2018; Bunnell et al., 2012; Chatterjee, 2005; Morris-Roberts, 2004)

Further, this coming together, in imagining and speculating, is in the same ways these children also enact their own inhabitation of community space in the NOW, to continue thinking with Weheliye (2014). In their everyday lives, the children describe ways of gathering and being together in the sociality of space, toward shared purposes of play, leisure, joy, and fun: boys, sacked from a schoolyard pitch and moving together and reassembling themselves within an uncompleted building to launch their football matches; girls and boys, setting up their bases. These children’s experiences of community space illustrate the ephemeral, temporary nature of these spaces. They make use of moments in space: the spaces that are available to them and available through and for temporary means in the ever-evolving assembling of histories, bodies, and potential emerge spaces that are never fixed but rather always the provisional and the possible through coming together, for children, or even adults, in an ever-shifting assemblage of bodies, and moments, and ideas, and desires, materials, and histories. Their experiences of community space demonstrate how these spaces are home to multiple experiences, both danger and unsafety, but also play, fun, and pleasure, read through the ways they are able to, through these practices of inhabiting, “experience their bodies not as vulnerable but as subversively ‘fun’ and enjoyably capable of taking risks” (Krishnan, 2019a, p. 3).

I begin to think about these children as constantly learning and implementing their own spatial grammar through their embodied practices of inhabiting community space, most particularly evidenced through our community street event. They demonstrate the workings of an alternative spatial logic, one that they themselves learn from, or learn via their interactions with other residents, particularly adults: from the celebrations of births (infant outdoorings) to keeping wake and mourning death (funerals), and everything in between, like religious meetings, weddings, and festivals. It is a learning from the already-normalized forms of moving in, and inhabiting spaces in temporary ways that structure adults’ own ephemeral practices, and before they would ever be able to build or construct in space in more

material ways. The children demonstrate a constant learning in navigating and moving through and in space, as Larry mentions in our porch conversation. For example, this is present in the way that Joshua, Widad, Hamid and others discuss setting up their bases. In academic scholarship, these bases are discussed as the preserve of young men who gather and sit together, potentially smoking or forming spaces of social bonds outside of their family networks, situating this need within their situations of prolonged periods of unemployment and recognized transition into the trappings of adulthood (Langevang, 2008; Cassiman, 2018). Yet these children also show that they too create their spaces, these “comfortable zones,” as Jordan calls them, where they sit with their friends and chat and share ideas and have fun and can be with their friends. These children model here one of their modes of learning the spatial grammar of the environment around them, enacting everyday magic practices that enable them to inhabit seemingly uninhabitable community spaces, in ways that often goes unnoticed.

This is also a landscape in which the children's usages of space are also continually attempted, continually thwarted, and continually tried again. For example in Abdul Majeed's story, by the time Tongoro and his friends are punished and sacked by the Assemblyman (when their football play lands the ball in the Assemblyman's face), it seems these boys have arrived to the lungu after several attempts in other locations. Nusrat describes a lungu in which she and friends once played tug-of-war and ampe, until residents, perhaps seeking to self-organize an infrastructural improvement, began building that dug up the ground on which the kids played, effectively displacing them. Yet Nusrat writes, alongside her image of the gravel and the uprooted piping, that she deliberately took this photo because she “will never forget the memories.” Her words demonstrate how memories of space continue to resonate with the children and potentially inspire them to go looking for other spaces they might use in similar or different ways. While unexplored in this research, perhaps this can point toward the resonances, impressions left, even in memories, that inspire and evoke desire for other such spaces the children could and plot to bringing into being. This is how we begin to see how these histories, these ways of doing that children seem to learn from adults and then themselves implement demonstrates how there is some sort of residual resonance that persists, not necessarily within the space, but potentially in the memories of those spaces that hangs on somehow to continue to influence how residents understand and desire, and extend toward.

On the other side of displacement, which I see assembling how community space is constructed from children's experiences of play and leisure, is the children's

magical practices of fugitivity. The children articulate and demonstrate through their visual, textual, drawn, and verbal narratives the persistence of unsettled and unsettling spatial practices within spatial relations in Nima. It is not just that these practices are ephemeral, temporary, and perhaps provisional; it is also that these children employ and normalize a method of fugitive spatiality of community space, which includes experiencing, learning, and reading the power dynamics, working through the constant thwarts, developing their own spatial grammar through which they can make space for themselves. Through these fugitive and magical practices that the children employ, they then remake other spaces into sites for play and leisure. The children learn from, inspire, and collaborate with each other, producing collective and interdependent imaginings that they use to narrate and map safer spaces. In our community street event, we gather and assemble to speak to these, and we also enact together a space to, for a moment and time, hold these children, their safety, dance, play, joy, laughter, and pleasure.

Within the dispossessing factors and forces that shape community space, an emphasis on the actions of inhabiting and dwelling (as verbs) becomes a way of seeing how the children enact a grounding process of gathering together. In sometimes quiet, sometimes loud, everyday acts, from avoiding space, to laughing, running, jumping, hoping, dreaming, imagining, hoping, their processes of inhabiting and dwelling shape a valuable part of the messy and diverse modes through which these children live Black life. These modes reveal other ways of understanding these children's geographies, and in ways that demand scholarly space for considering and theorizing their ways of engaging these children and their childhood - as also always playful, as humorous, as possibility (Twum-Danso Imoh, 2019).

Here I return to the scholarship on Blackness as method, both as a modality for attuning to spatial practices that unsettle the rigid fixedness of public space as inherited via colonialism planning guidelines, but also as a way of undoing this world that overrepresents the western bourgeois man as the dominant conception of the human - and its corollary practice of settled inhabitation that many of us would aspire towards. Saidiya Hartman defines waywardness as, among many things,

“ the insurgent ground that enables new possibilities and new vocabularies; it is the lived experience of enclosure and segregation, assembling and huddling together. It is the directionless search for free territory; it is a practice of making and being in relation that enfolds within the policed boundaries of the

dark ghetto...It is a *beautiful experiment* in how-to-live...It is the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive” (Hartman 2019, p.227-228, emphasis in original).

By following these children’s fugitive methods, their modes of scanning, seeing, and inhabiting space, this also allows us to see the way that everyday life takes place, as in, takes up space in Nima. So in following the fugitive trajectories and the movements of these children allows us to see the ways community space is made uninhabitable, but also ways outside of this dominant planning framework that are never possible or visible within plans, renderings, frames of maps and designs. The children’s experiences and their practice demonstrate their everyday methods of magic, to think with Mutawakil, their throwing together human intentions and embodied actions in space to set themselves up for sites and moments of pleasure, dancing, laughter, and joy. So these unsettled and unsettling methods of inhabiting space also facilitate the necessary moments of joy, pleasure, even mourning that, like our community event, cannot be mapped because of their de-linking from fixedness. Yet these moments of space remain and continually become essential and necessary, bearing life in contexts designed for a bare life, within the persistent realities and threats of injury, both because these children and other residents are seen as less-than-human, but also enabling them to continually make and remake their own fully humanness as they go along.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the SOI students’ inhabitations of community space as processes of assemblage, demonstrating how diverse and interrelated human alignments contribute to the neighborhood’s making and remaking, and I show these processes exist beyond the material construction of Nima as built environment. Through these narratives, I trace these children’s embodied, situated knowing of Nima’s lungus, streets, sidewalk pavements, and open spaces. I read these as material, social, and affective sites in which the children’s everyday experiences are felt, sensed, remembered, and imagined.

Through the five parts in this chapter, I argue for the interconnected relationship between the ways the children are made out-of-place and also make place. The four narratives of this chapter, each titled after the short stories produced by the SOI students, show the relational connections between the infrastructural, material, social, affective, practices, discourses, and felt experiences which produce for them the uninhabitable of Nima’s community spaces: analytical themes on issues of cleanliness; violence, threats of kidnapping, and avoiding certain spaces; smoking

and the effects of smoking; dangerous activities in the street and road accidents in the shaping of their experience of community spaces in Nima neighborhood. Is it in the collaborative analysis process that the SOI students weave together these seemingly disparate and heterogenous elements to convey their understandings, experiences, and imaginings of community space as an assembling of material, bodies, and affects which shape held together through social-spatial relations and processes. I demonstrate, through their everyday experiences, how this world of relations informs their spatial displacements and demands they make strategic and careful decisions to avoid certain spaces, part of an everyday lived experience of making their way through the world of Nima. I connect the SOI students' situated ways of knowing to a wider lived experience of the uninhabitable, which force Nima residents as Black subjects into questioning their existential status as human beings.

These children's community space experiences are constituted within the assembling of historical moments, memories, emotions and felt experiences, encounters, materials, bodies, and objects. In our participatory analysis workshops, the SOI students point to these heterogeneities, relating material, bodily, and affective realities in their understandings, experiences, and imaginings of community space. By building an understanding of place grounded in these multiple dimensions, I use this chapter to demonstrate that these children's experiences are shaped by their individual experiences and movements, their everyday encounters, and interpersonal interactions, as well as by larger structural processes. Within these experiences, they form hopes, desires, dreams, and speculate futures that point to more caring, humanizing possibilities for their neighborhood.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined children's embodied experiences of community space in the Nima neighborhood of Accra, Ghana. I have structured this thesis around two questions. *First, how do children articulate their everyday embodied experiences of community space in Nima? Second, how do children in their practices of inhabiting community space in Nima practice, perform, and imagine other ways of being and doing outside of dominant spatial frames?* The answers to these questions emerged from research collaboration with Spread-Out Initiative team members, particularly Larry, Fatimatu, and Mustapha, the participation of Spread-Out Initiative students who produced visual and textual materials eliciting their experiences, our collective production of a community event, and the (hi)stories shared in conversations with Nima elders.

I opened this thesis with the scene of a group of boys gathered together and playing pick-up football matches. Their kicks, yells, goals, friendship, and bodies assembled with that plot of land, demolition, in a plot of land and in the space and time between the demolition of residents' homes and businesses and the construction of a new building. This scene is one of multiple moments and relations that set the tone for this thesis, and it was in the previous chapter that I narrated four assemblages from which emerge the SOI students' felt, remembered, hoped for, enacted experiences of Nima community space. I have argued that community spaces are sites in which children experience both marginalization and displacement as well as togetherness, joy, and pleasure. I have shown this by tracing these children's lived experience of navigating community space environments. I illustrate the ways their access and capacities are enclosed by environmental neglect, everyday displacement, dangerous activities, and road accidents, as well as violence. Yet additionally emerging from these assemblages are their magical practices of care, creating spaces of gathering, play and leisure, and speculating futures as means of through which they inhabit uninhabitable community space environments. Further, I have shown that these inventive practices tap into existing and historical indigenous spatial relations, work within planning, but also reach toward alternative ways of being outside dominant planning frameworks.

To conclude, I return to the aims and objectives that I set out in the introductory chapter, this time using them to revisit the research findings and to elaborate the knowledge contributions from this thesis. I emphasize how and why this research

project has been an innovative knowledge production process in terms of its epistemological and methodological approach. I wrap up this thesis with a discussion on the implications I hope this research and thesis can have for the field of urban studies and geography, future research directions, and my personal learnings and situatedness within this academic space.

Research contributions

I opened this thesis with three aims and related objectives. First, I aimed to expand scholarly understandings of African children and their spatial experiences. To achieve this first aim, I worked with Spread-Out Initiative to collaboratively design and undertake arts-based research methods workshops and activities that centered children's lived experience of community space, everyday practice, and imagination. Second, I aimed to create a Black feminist knowledge production process. In order to do this, I built relations across our diverse Black identities and situated positions to recognize and acknowledge different situated knowledges, which we used to conceptualize research learnings and their meanings. Third, I aimed to situate Nima (and Accra and Ghana more widely) within a global Black geographies frame, and I did so by locating this research within the afterlives of slavery and colonialism and framing this urban and geographic research in conversation with Black Studies and Black feminist scholarship. In this section, I elaborate on each of these aims, the objectives used to meet them, and how this produced rich research contributions from this research project and thesis. While I discuss these aims, objectives, and contributions thematically, there is a deep and evident interrelation between them.

Expanding the understanding of Black African children and their worlds

In this thesis, I aimed to build a more expansive understanding of Black African children and their spatial experiences, and I wanted to position them as they are: creative beings who hold deep wells of knowledge, insight, and perspective on their worlds. As I elaborated in the introduction, the prevailing scholarship on African children's geographies has narrowly conceptualized these children as precarious and their spatial experiences as deeply marginalized. Much of this scholarship focuses on experiences of poverty, health crisis, conflict and violence and excludes children's play, fantasy, and imagining from areas of investigation, despite that in children's studies generally, these elements compose a critical component of everyday life. In shaping the research methodology, we (the SOI team members and I) co-produced arts-based methods workshops in which the children could express their own lived experiences, spatial practices, and speculations, and with an openness to play and leisure as a meaningful part of their everyday experiences in

community space. These methods workshops were grounded in the organization's existing ways of working with these students, as workshops in which the students produce creative texts, drawings, and photos. In these workshops, we also used these produced materials to elicit their memories, fears, desires, hopes, and imagination.

The learnings of this research project problematize and extend existing scholarship concerning children's geographies in urban Africa, specifically the everyday lives of African children at play and leisure. The narratives that the children produced demonstrate that they do experience marginalization and displacement, including through government neglect, interpersonal intimidations and violences. Yet it is also from these experiences that the children enact embodied practices of care and remake other spaces into sites for play and enable togetherness, making friendship, relations, and dream of the future. It is from their experiences that the children name their deep relations with other social actors, for example, food vendors, and they position gatherings and assemblies as means of creating safety, like community watch. This approach, grounded in their lived experience and imaginings, also directly informed our co-organization of a community street event, where we gathered and assembled together to speak to the displacements and violences they experience while also creating together a space that holds them, their safety, and their dancing, play, joy, laughter, and pleasure.

This research therefore raises questions about the dominance of children's geographies scholarship in urban African contexts which overwhelmingly focuses on employment and work, conflict, violence, and health and the dearth of scholarship exploring their world of play, leisure, and hanging out. This research suggests that these usual areas of attention, while relevant, also fail to attend to the rich imaginative and playful worlds of children in urban African contexts, which are fundamental components of their everyday life and exist (even amidst everyday experiences of structural and interpersonal violence), and further, provide generative learnings from which to consider urban space.

Creating a Black feminist knowledge project

In this research project and thesis, I sought to use a Black feminist praxis to open new spaces of knowledge production. Within the scope of this project, this included acknowledging and working with situated knowledges and local theorizing. To achieve this, I began from our (Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha and my) diverse Black identities, positionalities, and accountabilities as ways of knowing and operating in the world. These in turn informed our research practices, approach, and enabled us

to generate dialogue with neighborhood residents that informed the conceptual framework. Approaching this research as a Black feminist knowledge project demanded that we share our learnings in academic and non-academic spaces, which included situating a dialogue with residents in Nima through our community event. After completing our arts-based workshops, we (SOI students, SOI team members, and I) planned a community event to share our learnings and generate conversation within the community on our project. As I elaborated in the methodology, this was a space open to neighborhood residents to learn about our activities, respond, and ask questions as part of a process of being in conversation, and then a moment to generate a children-only play space. Here I focus on the first part of this event, in which we treated our research sharing as a conversation, rather than a dissemination exercise. Doing so enabled us to garner rich reflections from residents, including Honorable Tajudeen Shareau, who centered the notion of the human in Nima (“Are we not human beings?”), a line of thinking that underpins the conceptual framework chapter. We (Larry, Fatimatu, Mustapha, and I) engaged with his statement as a provocation, which we reflected on in our porch conversation, along with a similarly impactful statement from SOI team member Mallam Mutawakil on magic (“Ghanaians survive by magic”).

It was through this emphasis on being in relation, in communication, and accountability through our work that we produced new dialogues that in turn shaped how we would conceptualize our learnings. Our approach acknowledged local residents’ reflections as local theorizing, which Larry, Fatimatu, and Mustapha reflected on within our porch conversation. This became the foundation for developing the conceptual framework, which I constructed by putting these statements and conversations into relation with Black feminist, Black Studies, and Black urbanism and geographies scholarship. I explicitly drew on this scholarship as a mode of citational practice and producing knowledge through Black scholarly genealogies, and included the spatial concept of the uninhabitable and the racializing assemblages.

Therefore, our approach of using neighborhood residents’ knowledge and local theorizing as a starting point to think through our project created the opportunity to shape a unique conceptual framework which relates local and academic theorizing. This demonstrates that operating in relation – opening up our research to the community in which it was situated – produces contributions from residents that can richly inform how we as scholars conceptualize our own work. This process opened new spaces of knowledge production beyond conventional approaches and conceptualizations, demonstrating the rich empirical learnings and scholarly

contributions that emerge when we begin from the local conceptions of residents and how they understand their own worlds as the starting point and direction for engaging with scholarly theory. This contribution is in deep alignment with the Black African, African Diasporan, and Indigenous scholars' contributions on developing indigenous and anticolonial research methodologies (Tamale, 2020; McTighe & Haywood, 2018; Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 1999).

Situating Nima within a global Black geographies frame

Finally, I aimed to situate Nima within a global Black geographies frame. To do this, I read this project conceptually within the afterlife of slavery and colonialism, drawing on SOI's Pan-Africanist approach, our relations through our Black identities within this project, and emerging scholarship that calls scholars working in African contexts to critically engage all contemporary African societies within current discussions on contemporary race and Blackness (Pierre 2013). In this thesis, I contribute to an emerging approach in the fields of urban studies and geography: I take the demands of Black Studies, which are to interrogate the relevance of race and the ongoing impacts of racial slavery and colonialism, to consider spatial experiences in the post-independent Black country of Ghana. To do this, I recognize and build on existing scholarship critically demonstrating the contemporary workings of Blackness and racialization in Ghana (Bowles, 2021; Pierre, 2013; Holsey, 2008) using the concept of racializing assemblages (Weheliye, 2014).

By reading children's contemporary community space experiences in relation with the racial projects of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism, I have critically narrativized the SOI students' experiences as Black experiences imbued with memory and meaning and taking place in relation with these racial projects with produce human difference. I have drawn on and put this research in conversation with Black Studies scholarship to locate children's spatial experiences and practices within the wide realm of everyday Black spatial practices. In so doing I have stretched the scholarly discussions on Blackness, racialization, and space beyond the conventional geographies of colonial African, diasporan, and post-independent African settler contexts, pushing forward the field of urban studies and geography toward deeper interrogations of racialization and space in contemporary Black African locales.

Future directions

This research process and its learnings and contributions open up exciting avenues for future research that move beyond this present research project. In this section, I

explore the potential for future lines of research inspired by this research project and the implications I hope this research and thesis can have for the field of urban studies and geography.

Exploring the racial politics of contemporary planning discourses

In Chapter 2, I foregrounded conversations with Nima and Accra elders in order to use their (hi)stories to provide Nima's background context. Within that chapter, I noted Nima elders' consistent usage of the term "encroachment." I referenced the term's origins in colonial planning, and I considered critically the elders' usage of this term to describe and define their current circumstances. In addition to making the connection between this colonial terminology and contemporary usage, this also illuminates an entry point to exploring how racially based colonial planning terms and approaches have been taken up by locals to define their own worlds, and to consider anticolonial readings of post-independent planning discourses by both planning authorities and residents. I see this as a means of continuing research into the ways the racialization of planning in post-independent locales is perpetuated, including in post-independent contexts, and the ways that colonial processes of racialization in Africa were subsumed under "tribal" and ethnic categorizations (Pierre, 2013; Mamdani, 1996) and therefore are often not read as racial. While in the chapter I consider whether the Nima elders' usage of the term could be a form of Du Boisian double consciousness (Du Bois, 2007), I would be interested to explore this term further through discourse analysis, tracing how this racialized and colonial term has been employed by urban authorities and locals and further persists in the contemporary planners and residents' urban imaginary, therefore continuing to consolidate colonial understandings of planning, space, and the city. As the Kenyan novelist Ngugi Wa Thiong'o asserts: "The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and built environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe" (wa Thiong'o, 2008, p. 4). This approach provides the potential to critically explore as an anticolonial approach the continued relevance of histories of colonial planning as antiblack political violences, emphasizing language and discourse, their origins, and colonial baggage.

Centering Black African indigenous conceptualizations of space

In shaping the conceptual framework for this thesis, I drew on Black Studies and Black Feminist scholarship, as well as scholarship on human and nonhuman relational understandings of the world. While this speaks my intentions toward a global Black geographic frame, which I mention in the previous section, I have largely pursued this as diasporic thinking from Ghana. It would be interesting – and,

in line with centering Black African indigenous ways of understanding the world, indeed necessary – to explore how the centering of Black African epistemologies of place can also contribute to urban and geographic theorizing of urban African space and spatial relations, and spatial theorizing more globally. The integration of Black Studies into the urban and geographic fields is already anticolonial in the ways that Blackness fundamentally disrupts the narrative of modernity (Da Silva, 2014; Walcott, 2014; Weheliye, 2014; McKittrick, 2013). I am interested to explore further and find ways to center and build these in relation with Black African indigenous epistemologies, which also conceptualize the world through human, nonhuman, and spirit relations, and through the modernity project, have also been disrupted and peripheralized within academic hierarchies of knowledge (Chilisa 2012). For example, Chirikure (2020) uses the southern African philosophical concept of ubuntu to analyze historic urbanism patterns in this region’s context. Exploring these conceptualizations, as well as the ways they rub up against and might potentially clash with Black urban and geographic thought, would continue to emphasize Blackness as multiplicity and therefore differentially articulated across different geographies and experiences, with the opportunity to explore this through the medium of space and spatial relations.

Politics of care in inhabiting urban space

One of the key learnings from this research project is how the children employ practices of care through relational approaches in which they imagine improvements in their community space environment. Indeed, this care is fundamental for self-preservation, as well as in collectively producing radical possibilities (Lorde, 2017). These practices of care, which take place in contexts of precarious worlds shaped by systemic inequality and power structures, have been explored in geographic scholarship, for example with regards to global health interventions (Hirsch, 2019), as forms of infrastructure (Ashraful & Houston, 2020), and with regards to crime (Dadusc & Mudu, 2020) and homelessness (Lancione, 2019). These forms of care enable affective connections produced through a “feeling with” others, one which “offers visceral, material, and emotional heft to acts of preservation that span a breadth of localities: selves, communities, and social worlds” (Hobart & Kneese, 2020). Such forms of care are essential to feminist movements, in the practice of creative and subversive methodologies that center the well-being of children as part of a feminist agenda (Tamale, 2020). In this future research, I am interested to consider further the assembling of life for children and youth in precarious contexts through radical politics of care, drawing on feminist geographies and emphasizing human collectivity and relation as an approach to

thinking about possible futures of the city, and to further inform my considerations of inhabitation and relation to urban space in the urban African contexts.

Final thoughts and reflections

I have situated this thesis within Black African and Black diasporan geographic and urban scholarship to illuminate the continuing relevance of race, slavery, and colonialism's afterlives in our (Black peoples') spatial relations, experiences, and everyday realities. In doing this, I began from my own positionality as a Black woman. I described in the introduction how my positionality played a role in the relations through which the collaborative research project was shaped. In the conceptual framework (Chapter 3) and methodology (Chapter 4), I elaborated further on this, and in terms of how my positionality informed my Black feminist epistemological framework for this thesis and the deliberate theoretical connections I made working between local theorizing and conceptual scholarship. Here I also want to take up space to briefly reflect on my own experience of pursuing this research and writing this thesis as a Black woman within the UK academy. As a Black PhD researcher (and international student) in the UK academy who is navigating the urban studies and geography disciplines, it would be impossible for me not to reflect on my own experience and how it has been deeply entangled with the same racial politics and structures that shaped this research project. As Azeezat Johnson, a Black British Muslim and Black feminist geographer writes: "Academic knowledge created about what happens 'out there' is grounded in the relations that construct experiences 'in here'. One cannot be understood without the context of the other" (Johnson, 2018, p. 22)

Johnson writes this quote within a chapter on navigating the contradictions of developing research to disrupt racist violence while situated within academic spaces that reproduce that same racial violence (2018, p. 15). It reflects my own experience writing a thesis in which I center Black scholars and Black modes of thinking the world, while also recognizing how I am situated in a racially segregated city and a predominantly white institution of the neoliberal academy, studying in a field still grounded in a white western canon and that structurally absences Black women scholars (and Black scholars generally (Ohito, 2019; Esson et al., 2017; Tolia-Kelly, 2017)).

Herein lies my own frustrations and discomfort in the discordance between the space I seek to create in this thesis for Black voices and knowledges and the contradiction I feel in the academic world that I inhabit, where Black voices and knowledges feel so absent – within my department, in conferences, in reading

groups, for example. Digging into Black Studies and Black feminist scholarship has been necessary and has also made me keenly aware of the ways Black doctoral researchers and scholars – most particularly Black British – are structurally absented within UK academia and in the disciplines of urban studies and geography. In the UK, “the idea that Black people might explore and interrogate Geography is still, in the 21st century, a radical inversion” (Noxolo, 2020, p. 509). These words, and Black scholarship more generally, enable for me critical ways of seeing my own experience, of seeing my own place in this academic world, while continually remind me that the work of addressing racist violences is never only within the scholarship produced within our fields (such as this thesis), but also always within the very structures of academia itself that my body moves through. This experience has rendered visible for me how the academy, and the disciplines of geography and urban studies in particular, are also deeply entangled within the afterlives of slavery and colonialism in their dominant Eurocentric knowings of space and the urban (Roy, 2017; Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2009).

So, Black Studies scholarship has been a critical intellectual space for me, for regarding Black people’s full and deeply complex worlds as topics worth studying – such as these SOI students and their experiences of community space, even if still largely excluded from the canons of the discipline. In this way, the SOI students’ careful enactments of inhabiting uninhabitable spaces is also a space of learning for me, learning ways of my own gathering with other Black scholars, inside and outside the academy, coming together and imagining future worlds where we are cared for, respected, represented. These are futures that I too must imagine, hopefully and fervently, in the now.

As I conclude this thesis and consider the future of the field (and my place within it), I learn something from these SOI students and their ways of doing in their own context and circumstances. Perhaps I am also learning from them, in their enactments of humanity, of how to unsettle dominant ways of doing and thinking in this field of my own, and learning to make place for myself in a space that would make me out-of-place. Doing so, I believe, is both urgent and necessary, so that as scholars we would “live a true humanism – a humanism made to the measure of the world” (Césaire, 2000, p. 73), rather than to the measure of a few.

Appendices



Victoria Okoye <v.okoye@sheffield.ac.uk>

Fwd: Question: English language requirement for thesis (UK?)

7 October 2019 at 18:32

Begin forwarded message:

From: David A Heymann <d.heyman@sheffield.ac.uk>
Date: 7 October 2019 at 10:12:07 BST
To: Fionn Stevenson <f.stevenson@sheffield.ac.uk>
Cc: Beatrice De Carli <b.a.decarli@sheffield.ac.uk>, Wen-Shao Chang <w.chang@sheffield.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: Question: English language requirement for thesis (UK?)

Hi Fionn,

Beyond 'English' this is unregulated, so technically US English is acceptable.

Example of a (publicly available) thesis from the UoS Dept of English written in US: <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/3735/>

That said, we'd generally advise UK English, or at least to be very aware of potential issues if sticking to US English - we've had examiners go through and highlight each instance as an error before which isn't an ideal situation either way.

Best wishes,

Davy

Information Sheet

“Spatial practices of appropriation: Learning from everyday life in Accra, Ghana”

You are invited to take part in a voluntary research project, thank you for taking the time to read this. This research, which is lead by Victoria Okoye (PhD student, University of Sheffield in UK), Rita Garglo (No Limits Charity Organization in Ga Mashie) and Larry Aminu (Spread-Out Initiative in Nima), is taking place in Ga Mashie and Nima. We are exploring how residents use streets, sidewalks, and open spaces for everyday activities and adapt these spaces to their immediate needs. We would like to learn more about residents' different visions for the city, how they contribute to the city through the ways in which they connect to, use, and adapt urban spaces, and to share this information with city authorities to support more inclusive urban management and design. This research is for Victoria Okoye's PhD research at the University of Sheffield in the UK.

Your requested participation: You have been chosen to participate in this research study as a youth who with your parents' consent does creative activities with Rita or Larry, OR because you are an adult residing in the neighbourhood and recommended to us by word of mouth. We seek to engage a small number of youth and adult participants in your neighbourhood. In our initial sessions, we will ask you to create visual materials (such as photographs, maps, or drawings) representing how you experience and use space. We will ask you questions about your experiences, thoughts and ideas about particular spaces. These sessions would last 1-2 hours. We will also ask you to write or tell stories about you vision of the future of these spaces, using the visual materials you created and based on your own hopes for spatial improvements. These sessions would last 2-3 hours. We will also ask you to share your insights, perspectives, and recommendations in a community sharing session that would last half a day. We will respect your time availability, interest and consent to participate.

Your participation is completely voluntary. It is up to you to decide if you would like to take part in this research. If you do participate, you will have this information sheet to keep. We will also give you a consent form to sign and given a copy. You can withdraw your consent at any time. You do not need to provide any reason.

Recorded Media: We will make audio and visual recordings of your activities during this research. Victoria will keep the photos and drawings and can provide you copies if you like. These audio and/or video recordings of your activities made during this research will be used for analysis and for illustration in academic presentations, publications, and community-generated materials. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

Participant Benefits, Safety and Well being: Your contribution to this project is important. While there are no immediate benefits for those participating in this project, it is hoped that we can find ways to use this work to change mindsets about the ways space is planned, designed and managed in your neighbourhood and in Accra. Learnings from this research will be shared with city authorities, policymakers and academics to inform their work. We can also discuss other ways you would like to share the ideas generated from this research to serve you and your communities' interests. Your participation is not likely to cause you any disadvantages or discomfort. The potential physical and/or psychological harm or distress would be will be the same as any experienced in everyday life; in this case, the inconvenience of volunteering you free time.

Research Data: The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

Information Sheet

“Spatial practices of appropriation: Learning from everyday life in Accra, Ghana”

The information you provide as part of our sessions will directly inform the research project. We will discuss the produced visual materials between participants in initial discussions and when we seek to analyse the information and create urban narratives for the neighbourhood. The results of this research project will be published. We will share findings and insights from this research in the community sharing sessions, which will be presented to other residents, city authorities, and researchers. We will share findings from this research project via online websites, such as the website blog African Urbanism (www.africanurbanism.net); we will share updates on social media, and we will co-produce content for local newspaper and radio to be shared widely. Findings will also be shared in Victoria's final PhD thesis (to be completed in 2020) and in academic writings and journal articles that she publishes concerning this research project. No one outside of this research project or the University of Sheffield research support will be allowed access to your data or the original recordings.

The processing of your personal data includes sensitive data (including information about your age, religion, ethnic and social identity, and location). This is necessary for the performance of this research task which is carried out in the public interest.

Your privacy is important. All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. We will use some identifiable data. On the consent form, you can indicate if you would like to be anonymised, or if you would like to be referred to by your real name or pseudonym in any reports or publications produced from this research. Your identifiable information will only be included in reports or publications if you have given your explicit consent. Any information collected about you will be stored in secure location, including a password-protected online storage.

This research project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the Sheffield School of Architecture. If you would like to raise any complaint about this research project or how you have been treated, I have included the contact information for the research team and Victoria Okoye's PhD supervisor.

Thank you!

For more information - Research Team Contact Details:

Victoria Okoye
University of Sheffield

Rita Garglo
No Limits Charity Organization

Larry Aminu
Spread Out Initiative

Research Supervisor:
Beatrice De Carli
University of Sheffield

[PERSONAL CONTACT DETAILS HAVE BEEN REMOVED FOR INCLUSION IN THESIS]

Participant Consent Form

“Spatial practices of appropriation: Learning from everyday life in Accra, Ghana”

<i>Please tick the appropriate boxes</i>	Yes	No
Taking part in the project:		
I read and understand the project information sheet and/or the project has been fully explained to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that taking part in the project will include producing visual materials (like maps, drawings, photographs), participating in group analysis sessions, and participating in group sharing meetings to share the results from this project in my local community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that the researcher will audio record discussion sessions with me and keep any visual materials I produce. I understand I can request a copy. I understand this data will be stored privately, securely and safely so only research team members can access it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my participation is voluntary. I understand I can withdraw from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part. I understand there are no negative consequences if I withdraw.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How information will be used during and after the project:		
I understand my personal details such as phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand my personal details such as age, neighbourhood location, neighbourhood landmarks, religious affiliation, ethnic identity, social, cultural identity may be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential, and I specify that I would like to be credited (please circle choice) : <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="text-align: left; width: 45%;"> Do not use my name. I want to use an anonymous name. </div> <div style="text-align: left; width: 45%;"> Refer to me as (please indicate): _____ </div> </div>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will be named according to my request above.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
So that the information can be used legally by the researchers:		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant [print]:

Signature:

Date:

Name of participant guardian [print]:

Signature:

Date:

Name of Researcher [print]:

Signature:

Date:

For more information - Research Team Contact Details:

Victoria Okoye
University of Sheffield

Rita Garglo
No Limits Charity Organization

Larry Aminu
Spread Out Initiative

Research Supervisor:
Beatrice De Carli
University of Sheffield

Save 2 copies of the consent form: 1 paper copy for the participant, 1 copy for the research data file

SOI Student Self-Introductions

Hiba

"I am thirteen (13) years old, I attend [school] and am in Form '2'a. Nima is my hood, singing and reading are my hobbies, writing is my skill and of course I am a female."

SHEIK

"I am a human being and I am also a student...I am a male. I am 12 years old and in class 6 in [my school]. Am a Muslim and like to ride bicycle. And my skills to write. I respect my parents at home and also my friends."

Widad

"Female. Islamic religion. Class Four (4)."

Emmanuel

"I am a male. I am twelve years of age. I am in class six in [my school]. I am from the Christian religious family. I like reading and like to develop good aspects in life."

Mariam

My name is Mariam and I am 16 years of age. I am chocolate in complexion. I am in SHS 1. My hobbies are reading and swimming. I also love to listen to music a lot. The game I like best is volleyball. I have two siblings and I am the eldest.

Abigail

"I am 11 years old. I am in Class 6...I am a Christian. I like dancing and writing. I like fufu with light soup. I am fair in complexion. I am 4 feet tall."

Joshua

Joshua: "I am a human being and also a student. My name is Joshua. I am a male. And I am 14 years of age. And also I am in JHS 2 in [my school]. I am a Christian. And also I like to play football. I also like to learn raps when I am having free time."

Nusrat

"I am 16 years old. I am in SHS 2. My religion is Islam. I like to read, write, act and play basketball. I am great at writing poems and stories. I like listening to music. I am a proud black woman. I am funny, loyal and strong witted. I like black, ash, and blue. This is ME."

(Note: not all SOI students provided these)

SULLEY

“I am a male and I am 15 years old. I attend [my school] and I am in Form Three (3). I am a Muslim and I like to read the Holy Quran.”

Abdul Majeed

“I am a male. I am fifteen years old. I attend [a school in Nima] and I’m in Form three (3). I am a Muslim and I like to read story books.”

Jordan

“I am a human being. I am a boy. I am 13 years old. I am in class 6. I attend [school]. I am a Christian. I like drawing.”

Tanko

“I am 14 years old, I am in JHS 1 in school. I am a boy (male). I like dancing, football, reading, learning. I also have the skill to draw, the skill to play football, I have the skill to dance, etc. I have a tribal mark on my face which shows who I am and where I am coming from. I am a Muslim.”

Fati

“...the only thing that makes me unique is my character and confident, am a girl of her own capacity; am 17, am in SHS Form 2 home economics, am a Muslim and my hobbies are singing and dancing, drawing, poem and storywriting are my skills.”

Abdallah

“I am a male of 15 years. I am in Form 3. I am a Muslim. I like reading and writing. I am good at presentation of work I am a student of Nima Space Artist.”

Usman

“Usman was the only name [my parents] of giving to their fourth and last baby boy. He grew up and is now 15 years old. He attends school. He is a proud Muslim. He likes to play video games and is good at art. [I am] one of a kind.”

**PHOTOVOICE WORKSHOP:
Saturday, March 2 - Wednesday, March 6**

SOI Workshop Facilitators: Larry, Mustapha, Fatima, Mutawa, Tikas, Abubakar
Co-Facilitator: Victoria

ITEMS WE NEED

- T-shirts
- Notebooks and pens
- Cameras (4)
- Food - Wednesday the 6th - (rice and chicken)
- Food - Sat and Sun - (biscuit + drink)
- Venue (school)
- Time & Transport (T&T) for SOI team members

WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

- To reflect on and discuss together the ways different people claim and use specific public spaces (streets, sidewalks, open spaces, *lungus*) in Nima;
- To explore how young people experience these claimed and used spaces: How they encounter these spaces, their experiences, and what these spaces mean for young people;
- To generate creative ideas to direct our further work together (narrowing focus on specific ways of claiming and using space in Nima);
- To build positive relationship between the SOI participants and Victoria.

**WORKSHOP TIMETABLE
DAY 1 / Saturday, March 2**

3:00 - 3:05pm	Welcome!
3:05 - 3:15pm	Game Play (Ice breaker) prayer 3-3:15

3:15 - 3:30pm	<p>Explaining our workshop: What we are doing today</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working together to document the ways in which residents claim and use space. • Exploring how you, as young people, experience these spaces and navigate them yourselves • Two photography outings • Discussing our photos (in small groups, in big group) • Selecting your favorite photos for exhibition + presentation • Writing captions to describe and tell the story of our photos
3:30 - 3:40pm	<p>Ground Rules for Our Safe Space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Respect – Give Chance - Listening - Adding Another Perspective - My Experience - My Knowledge - What other additions???
3:45 - 4:15pm	<p>Discussion & Brainstorming</p> <p>Today's Question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the different ways people in Nima claim and use streets, pavements, lungus, open spaces? Let's capture some of these spaces. • What does this question mean for you? • Decide in your small groups which spaces you would like to visit and talk about.
4:15 - 5:45pm	<p>Photo Documentation in Small Groups</p> <p>Today's Question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the different ways people in Nima claim and use streets, pavements, lungus, open spaces? Let's capture some of these spaces.
5:45 - 6:00pm	<p>Setting up PROJECTOR + PHOTOS to laptop</p>
6:00 - 6:20pm	<p>Sharing round in small groups</p> <p>Sharing round in big groups</p>

DAY 2 / Sunday, March 3

3:00- 3:10pm	<p>Game Play (Ice breaker)</p>
3:10- 3:15pm	<p>Re-visiting our Ground Rules: #Respect, #Giving Chance, #Listening, #Adding Another Perspective (everyone has right to their own experience and opinion), other additions</p>

3:15- 3:45pm	Discussion & Brainstorming: Today's Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is YOUR experience navigating, using, and claiming public spaces in Nima (streets, sidewalk spaces, open spaces, lungus, etc)? • Which spaces are meaningful to YOU? • How do YOU engage with these spaces?
3:45- 4:45pm	Photo documentation in small groups: Today's Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is YOUR experience navigating, using, and claiming public spaces in Nima (streets, sidewalk spaces, open spaces, lungus, etc)? • Which spaces are meaningful to YOU? • How do YOU engage with these spaces?
4:45 - 5:00pm	Setting up PROJECTOR + PHOTOS to laptop
5:00 - 5:30 pm	Sharing round in small groups Sharing round in big group
5:30 - 6:00pm	Debrief and Discussion and Preparation for Wednesday

Monday, March 4

3:00 - 6:00pm	Optional: Participants can take additional photos
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Tuesday, March 5

Victoria at SOI	Victoria prints participants' selected photos
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Wednesday, March 6

10:00- 10:15am	Arrival
10:15- 10:20am Facilitator: Victoria	Re-visit Our Ground Rules Respect, Giving Chance, Listening, Tolerance, Kindness, Different Experiences, We Correct Each Other, Generous, Sharing Ideas, Active Participation, Cooperation
10:20am - 12:00pm Facilitators (work within the four groups)	10:00am: Larry departs to pick up Papaye (takeaway order) Writing Photo Stories Separate to Groups 1-4; youth select their favorite 4 photos. Youth write photo stories using the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How people in Nima (including youth) claim and use streets, sidewalks, open spaces? • Youths' own experiences using public spaces in Nima (streets, sidewalk spaces, open spaces, lungus, etc) - including positives and negatives • How do youth themselves use with these spaces? • Which spaces are meaningful to youth themselves and why?
12:00 - 1:00pm All Facilitators	Exhibition Set Up & Explore Each Other's Photos [Time for Prayer, as needed] Victoria and Fatima set up PPT (with favorite photos) for presentations
1:00 - 1:45pm Facilitators: Mustapha & Tikas	Lunch Time [Time for Prayer, as needed] Larry sets up projector for presentations

<p>1:45 - 3:00pm</p> <p>Facilitators: Fati & Victoria</p>	<p>Youth Present Their Favorite Photographs, Part 1</p> <p>Format: Group by group, each individual participant presents their photos, and answers questions from other participants and facilitators.</p> <p>First two groups of participants present their photos.</p> <p>Q&A can include questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why this photo (and additional details about photo)? • Whose photos share an experience that is similar or connects with your own experience (identify photo(s) and discuss your reasons)? • What differences captured in someone's photo from your own? • How does being you (young, boy/girl, living in particular area of Nima, Muslim/Christian, etc) shape your experience of the space(s) you captured?
<p>3:00-3:15pm</p>	<p>Time for Prayers</p>
<p>3:15 - 4:30pm</p> <p>Facilitators: Mustapha & Tikas</p>	<p>Youth Present Their Favorite Photographs, Part 2</p> <p>Format: Group by group, each individual participant presents their photos, and answers questions from other participants and Facilitators.</p> <p>Second two groups of participants present their photos.</p> <p>Q&A</p>
<p>4:30 - 4:45pm</p> <p>Facilitators: Victoria & Larry</p>	<p>Youth Participants' Feedback Time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you enjoy most? What was more difficult? • Which spaces you wanted to explore, but were unable to? • What did you learn about Nima and about each other?
<p>4:45 - 5:00pm (Facilitators Only)</p>	<p>Reflection Discussion</p> <p>What worked well? What can we learn from?</p> <p>What do we need to know/do in order to do better next time?</p>

BODY MAPPING WORKSHOP

March 30-31, 2019

Facilitators: Larry, Fati, and Mustapha

Co-Facilitator: Victoria

So previously we did PhotoVoice. We went out into the community, and we snapped pictures of all different types of public spaces - streets, pavements, lungus, open spaces. We talked about all the different spaces, the people there, what they do there, the positive and negatives about those spaces. So we learned there are lots of different public spaces in Nima, and these spaces get used in lots of different ways.

Today, we will create our own individual body maps. Each person will create their own body map and then present their body map to the rest of the group.

A body map is a life-size drawing. You use this drawing to describe for us your own experience about public spaces you use in Nima. With body maps, you use art to create an artwork that describes your life experience. We know that for any public space out there - like Berlin Bridge, or the school with its football pitch, or Fubu 05 base - that is a specific physical space, but each person who uses that space will have their own personal experience.

So for example, there is only one Fubu 05, but some people go there as a base, some people go when there is a wedding. For some it is a space to hang out, for some it is a space where it is noisy, for some it is a place to go to celebrate an event or activity. So there are so many different experiences of just a one place. One person may use it for one activity, another person may use it for another different activity.

So today we want to understand, for each of you, your own personal experiences. Not every one's experience is the same.

Day 1

Mustapha & Victoria	Re-visit Our Ground Rules Respect, Giving Chance, Listening, Tolerance, Kindness, Different Experiences, We Correct Each Other, Generous, Sharing Ideas, Active Participation, Cooperation
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<p>Introduction Larry</p>	<p>Explain the Body Mapping Process</p> <p>Using drawings, symbols, artwork, and text to explain your personal experiences that you experience with your body.</p> <p>Tell us more about you and your own experience of community space in Nima. Please describe your experience of claiming and using public spaces in Nima: The activities you do in these places? Your thoughts on these experiences? Your feelings/emotions about these experiences? Your memories about these experiences? Your personal connections to these places?</p>
<p>Facilitator Body Map Presentations</p>	<p>Victoria presents her body map. Mustapha presents his body map. Fatima presents her body map. Larry presents his body map.</p>
<p>Group Example</p>	<p>We work with 1-2 students to work through each question, one-by-one, on the board.</p>
<p>Written Exercises</p>	<p>The students note down the questions in their notebooks and take the rest of the day to complete the written exercise, writing down at least four responses for each question.</p>

Day 2

<p>Student Work</p>	<p>Working in phased groups, we give each student a large piece of paper. Using their ideas from their notebooks as starting points, they now produce their own body maps.</p> <p>Materials: Large white paper, markers, and crayons</p> <p>Once they complete their body maps, Victoria with Mustapha/Larry/Fati will come and record their presentation as they describe their map the significance of everything they included.</p>

Renovation

The sun stood sturdily in the middle of the sky, its bright rays to the face of its beloved. Outside was burning, the ground was hot, but the whirling air condition kept the room breezy. The huge curtain flapped and flowed in a dance of the waves.

The red and blue chairs sat round to bear witness to a serious conversation. A young girl sat on a blue chair, tapping impatiently on the wooden floor board. An older woman sat opposite on a red chair looking intently at the young girl. A crooked but sturdy voice began to play.

"When I was born it was not this beautiful and clean. I was born on the fourth day of the second week of May 2003. Nima was verbally a slum. Houses packed together like a beehive, shops running on pavement and streets. Filth and rubbish our neighbors, house flies our friends. People got sick as easily as they ate, bad smell the ultimate perfume. Nima was a slum from all corners, left to right, up and down. Things were like this for a very long time, up until I was sixteen.

The problem was getting worse, accidents were increasing, the government decided to make a change. By then, there was huge hostels at Dodowa, so the government gave each and every country a place to relocate to. Then the hard job began; caterpillars, tractors and rubbish collectors were among the materials used to clean the gutters and clear the rubbish. The packed houses and shops were destroyed and replaced. Soon Nima was clean and had beautiful and well planned settlements.

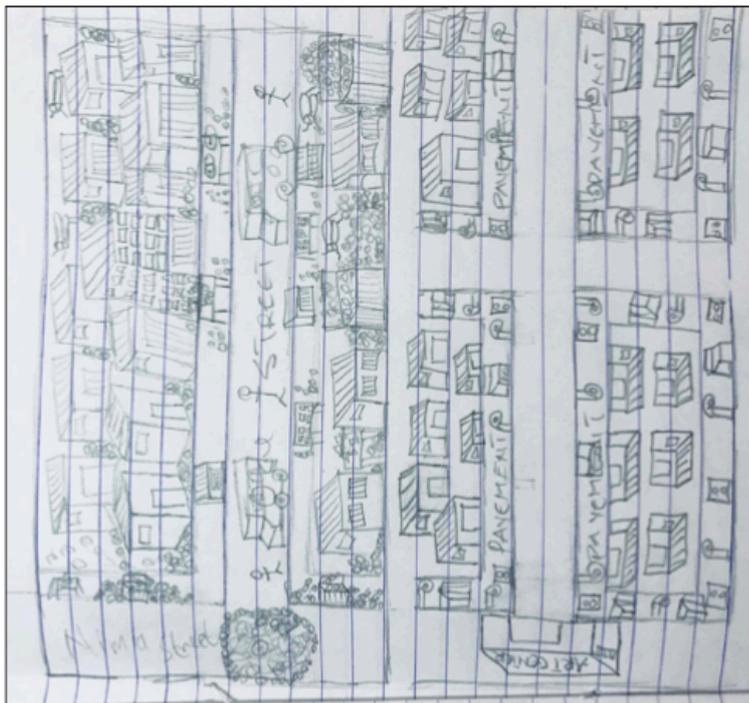
We came back to a different Nima; we came to the Nima you see today."

Just then the oven gave a loud beep and grandma had to go for the chicken. I took my bicycle and began my journey on the huge pavement.

4

I peddled past the street lights and soon the traffic light. I looked around me, my eyes met with the huge story building forming a perfect square. It met with the huge pavement and two-way streets. It met the street lights, traffic lights, and rubbish dumps.

I met with not a single heap of rubbish or uncovered gutter anywhere. No matter how hard I tried to imagine the story grandma Nusra told me, I couldn't imagine Nima ever being a slum. I packed my bicycle outside and prepared to enter the Art Center. Just then a fly buzzed my ear, then I swatted it away.



5

Resurrection

I remember stretching my legs and my antelets when I woke from my slumber on a heap of rubbish.

Then I circled around the black dirty water and listened to the enchanting melody.

Then went through the heaps of rubbish picking up bacteria.

I fly to the ugly homes and search for a hungry, eating human.

With a sleek dive I touch the food and leave the bacteria then fly upwards to avoid being hit.

On and on I flew until I got to the cafe by the street.

Then I fly low and *buzz buzz* at the ears of the children being sacked.

I expected to repeat my routine when I was resurrected, round and round I flew but did not see a gutter or heaps of rubbish.

All was clean and spotless.

I went round a flowing water, but it was pure white and sounded different.

I flew to the cafe area, but all I saw was a huge beautiful building.

But at least something stayed the same - a kid was outside the door.

Like usual I *buzz buzz* at her ear. *Swap!*

I fell to the ground and before I died again

I saw her being welcomed to the building and thought

"I was resurrected to a different Nima."

6

Victims of the Dark

Grandma sitting on a chair and telling us a poem as a story.

The day kept me wondering all night long.

Born in Nima, am black and proud.

The day smoked a giant, clouded, burning sun. The street hawkers of the busy market sketched their way with "Agoo agoo!" along with the street vendors who kept on saying "Yes, pure water, *ɲfos ɲfos!*" and the smell of foodstuffs made the day warm.

The pavement is filled with ladies and gents, the street stretched four conored busy roads with vehicles, the driver in the big tractor blows his horn *pipipi*, giving the sign of "give way, give way." Pedestrians finding their way to the bus station in the scorching sun of the day, *okadas* sparking *boom boom*. And when all is over, how come such a day will end up to be a nightmare, when the dying moon gives as a knock. The victims of the night wishing to wake up early.

Kidnappers, armed robbers, smokers everywhere. Am the victim at night singing "Oh, God."

The gun is pointed at me. "Bring out everything you've got!"

I am dead and still breathing. How come? When will this ever end? I want to wake up before I die **indeed**.

Am all alone in the dark. When will this ever end? Victims of the night.



7

Covering the Drain and Making It As A Walkway

There lived a 57-year old man. He was the assemblyman called He lives in a community called Nima in Greater Accra and there was a popular place called Gutter. There was a drain there and people used to walk on it and also holes were created on it. Some people used to fall inside and that the drain leads to the Kanda Highway. There was rubbish in the drain and houses were near the drain. sat down in his foamy arm chair as he thought of how to cover the drain and make it as a walkway so that people can pass on it to Kanda Highway from the gutter. He set to work hiring caterpillars and collecting rubbish from the drain. At last he finished covering the drain and making it as a walkway gutter to Kanda Highway. People of the community were happy and that people always voted for him every four years and that made him very famous in the community of Nima. Now the people used to walk on it for safety.

Nima

In my community there lived smokers at Research Gorillas opposite the public toilet. People smoke there every day, time, hour, minute, and second. The name of the base is called MM base meaning Money Makers. There are stores and houses and people passing through that route. The smoke is inhaled by these people which can affect their health. Smoking is dangerous to the health of the smokers and those around too. To be able to stop this, the police should arrest all of the them and use that space for playing ground or children, since that space is an open space.

Market Park

Not too long time ago, there lived in Nima Zongo a lot of sellers who sell on the street, some of them are seriously injured, others too steal in Nima Market. They face many problems. Others sell and they get a lot of profit while others sell and run at a loss. All the problems they face in Nima Market is all about sacking them and getting a new place for them whereby you can find police around them so that they should be safe. Others too must be sacked from the pavement to different places because it is meant for pedestrians to walk on it. When the traders sell on the pavement, many people don't get to pass on the pavement but they will rather pass on the street and it might cause an accident. And they can use small space on the pavement to build a bus-stop, because the pavement is close to the street, so when they sit at the bus-stop they can easily take a car to go to their destination. Also in Nima community, the pavement is meant for people to pass on it freely. And it is not meant for traders to sell things. It is not good to sell on the pavement, because a car or a motorbike break can fall and it might knock you and your items down.

Our Community Nima

Not too long time ago, lived a community named Nima in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. It was believed that the community was named after its ancestral king named Nii Man. Children and other elderly people feel unsafe in the community because of the evil acts of its citizens.

There lived a young boy by the name of Tongoro who likes playing with his friends in the lungus. He never felt safe whenever he

played in lungus with his friends. They were always sacked and driven away anytime they go to play. They saw that playing in the lungus of their own community was not safe for them so they one day decided to play in a lungu near to the Assembly Man's house. That day was not their lucky day and as they were playing football, a boy by the name of Karim kicked the ball and it hit the Assembly Man's face. He caught them and took them to his house. He punished them severely and drove them out of his house.

They all went home weeping and Tongoro narrated to his father the whole incidence. His father as the elder of the community thought much about that and brought an idea. He discussed it with the other elders and they decided to include the Assembly Man. They also discussed with the Assembly Man and he put the case in front of the government.

The government gave the Assembly Man the necessary amount that will be needed to build a community park where the children will play. He discussed the issue with the elders of the community on how to build a community park. Before the government gave the money to him, it was a very tough struggle and the community members had to go for a demonstration before the government came to their aid.

One week later, the construction of the park began. The young men used cement block to build a fence around the park. The children were asked to weed the bush and the women fetched the water which will be necessary for the job. One month later, the park was completed and the park was placed in charge of the assembly.

The Assembly Man decided to organize a competition between the members of the community. Boys were playing football and the girls played ampe. The winners were given a very big prize and the losers were also awarded but not as those who won. From that time, both the children and the grownups lived happily ever in the community. Thank you.

Footbridge

Faisal is a boy of fifteen years who lived with his mum and three siblings. They lived in a community called 441, a suburb of Nima. Their home is a compound house with about 15 neighbors. There is a big polytank at the corner of their house where all the people in the house fetch water.

Mrs. Fatima, mother of Faisal, was a very hardworking mother who would sell koko in the morning, pure water and drinks in the afternoon, and Indomie in the evening at the pavement around the Kanda Highway since it is not far from her house.

Faisal, the eldest among the four children, was from school one Tuesday afternoon crying all the way to the house looking for his mother. He came home and could not find her. He looked for her in the whole house and finally thought she would be selling at the streets so he headed to where she was.

Mrs. Fatima was busily going up and down in the hot sun shouting, "Pure water, drinks." Faisal saw his mother and tried to cross the road to her, as he tried crossing the traffic lights were red so he thought he can cross now. Sooner or later noises were heard from the other side of the road, "Stop, stop" before everyone would realize, there was a motorbike with full speed coming from the other side of the street and knocked Faisal down.

Mrs. Fatima and the others selling at the streets went to see what happened, before she could say anything, it was her son, Faisal. "You were supposed to be in school," cried Mrs. Fatima. He was sleeping in a pool of blood and tried to tell his mother something. All he could say was "school fees." He was rushed to the nearby hospital and got treatments. He was admitted for almost two weeks.

Faisal is home, after staying in the hospital for two weeks. He is now better. All that was running in his mind was if there had

been a footbridge he could have used that to reach his mother. He started advocating for the construction of a footbridge at the Kanda Highway; he wouldn't want anyone to be in the situation he had been. Two weeks from school, he had lots to learn. Soon the MP for the community brought up the plan for the construction of the footbridge, three months past, then a year now, since the incident Kanda-Nima community footbridge had been constructed. Now the children in that community are happy because they don't have to use the main street but rather the footbridge.

Nima Urbanism

Not so very long ago in Zongo community called Nima. Nima is a municipal community which is full of lungus in it. There lived an inspired boy by the name Abdullah He had a dream of solving the problems of lungus in his community. He uses the lungu when going to school.

The problem facing Nima is that the lungus are not cemented and that people get hurt. Abdullah uses the lungu when going to school, going to his advice spot, going to relaxing spot, rest stop and walking with his father to their recreational spot. People always say that lungu is a short cut to their destination.

One day, Abdullah was going to school and then he saw an old woman. She was carrying a big load and was suffering passing through the lungus. He felt pity for the old woman. She was carrying the load and passing through the uncemented lungu. Abdullah collected the load from the old woman. As they walked, Abdallah asked her why didn't she use the pavement rather but use the uncemented lungu. She said, "My son, the only shortcut way to my destination is the lungus and now the lungus are not safe for me now because it is not cemented."

Abdullah came to SOI a special NGO in Nima, studying his book.

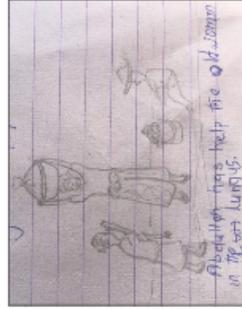
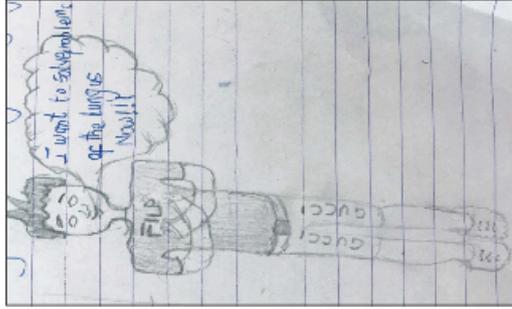
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Abdullah is not comfortable about the past event. Everyday Abdullah prayed to God Almighty so that he can give an opportunity to curb the impending danger about the lungus. Then one day, a Diasporan who is called Auntie Victoria came to SOI with the intention of Nima Urbanism. Then Abdullah got the opportunity to air his views on the impending danger that is arriving to the community. The project took about 15 days and we went out to make a photo voice about the lungus, the people ask for help to cement the lungus. Auntie Victoria taught about the problem very deep. She used her fund but it was not enough.

Mr. Larry who was the founder of SOI knew the intention of Abdullah. He tried and give Abdullah the platform to have a chat with the Zongo focus boss. He also thought about the problem and gave out funds to start the project work. Everybody in the community contributed themselves to it.

They created an operation to cement the lungus. The men in the community helped in mixing the mortar and the women helped in fetching the water and cooking for the hardworking men. It took the community hours, days, weeks, months, and finally it was done. Nima had all its lungus completed. And everyone lived happily ever after.

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Solutions



Far away on the streets of Nima lived two siblings and they go by the name of Tanko the first child and Fati the second child.

They are both hardworking and respectful so as their friends they made, but as Nima kids they are being criticized at school due to the violent populations of Nima. To be frank, that's what makes them popular. It's four o'clock in the morning and Mrs. Sani woke Fati and TK. She told Fati to go and sweep the compound house and TK to take his bath.



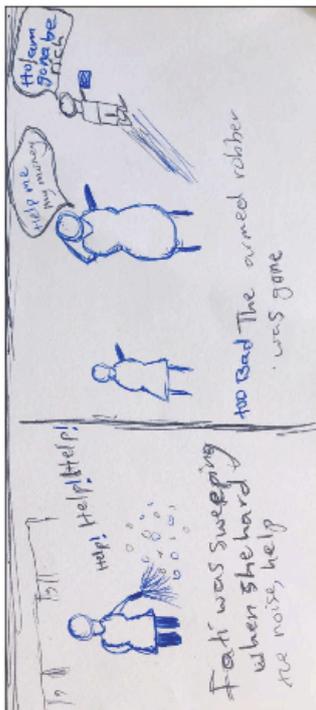
As Fati was sweeping, she heard a noise from afar.

She listened deeper and it was a lady's voice. She was calling for help in the lungus, close to Fati's house. Quickly, Fati ran out to help the lady. Then she saw a man running. It was an armed robber, but too late the man was gone.

Suddenly, her mom shouted her name and she entered the house and told her mom everything.

At 6:00, both kids took off for school. On their way to school, they

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saw people beating a woman to death on the pavements four blocks to Fati's school.

"Hi! TK aren't you late for school?" Tanko turned and it was Amina, she was also on her way to school.

"Amina what happened? Why are they beating the woman? They will kill her," TK asked.

"It better they kill her, this is the fourth time she kidnapped a child and was caught," answered Amina.

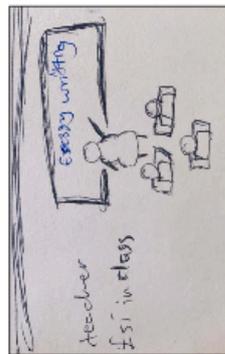


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The three friends had nothing to talk about so they continued their journey to school. At school, teacher Esi was the first teacher in class to teach English on Monday mornings, and today's topic was essay writing.

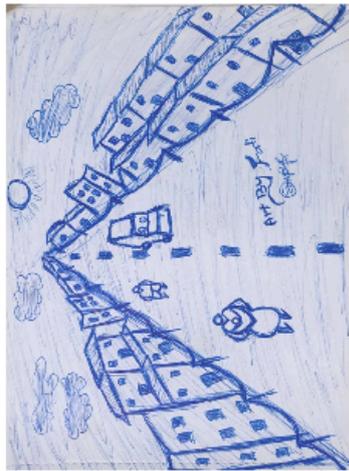
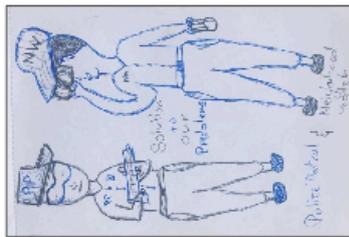
She told us a story as an example and it was about an asthmatic patient who lived with his sister and brother. His sisters and brother were drug addicts. One day after a long day from work he came home to meet his siblings smoking in the living room. He begged them to go out and they refused, so he decided to go out where the air was smooth and fresh. Suddenly, his brother pushed him to the ground and forced him to smoke.

He started breathing heavily then died. The gateman saw what happened and reported them to the police. The teacher's story moved everyone in the class. And she grouped them in three. Fati, TK and Amina were in one group and their story was to write about the prevention of dangers and criminal activities in their community. They remembered what happened that day and they all brainstorm about the solution.



They started with early morning robbers and their solution was to have a police patrol in the community at all times. Then neighborhood watch to unmask kidnappers in the community, as for people who abuse themselves with drugs, they must be educated on the dangers on them and the innocent.

And if they don't have a listening ear, then the police can interfere in the issues, for everyone to live healthy and happy. For as a healthy mind comes from a healthy body, to develop Nima as a better place.



The Drain

The Nima community is a very popular community in the whole of Ghana and even outside. And it is well known by the filth of the gutters and the smoke from the weed smokers, and the buzzing of the houseflies and the smell from the feces in the gutters. The people of Nima need a renovation of the place, the community, the gutters, especially the drains which we are about to talk about.

The drain is a very big-sized hole which water passes through when it rains. But for Nima community, that is not what it is. People use it for their dumping sites. They dump all sorts of rubbish, and they don't care. That rubbish they dump in the gutter causes harm to them, like flood and spreading of diseases, etc. It is caused by

the dumping of the rubbish in the gutters by Nimanians. There is a day when the people of Nima community will realize what you are doing will not benefit us anything but disasters, illness and death.

There is a solution, one said. His name was .

a.k.a Baba Jallo Tumbingiwa. He was given a solution to the problem Nimanians were suffering from. Baba told the people: "What you are doing makes the Nima community even worse, it doesn't take the Nima community far. So we have to stand up, pick up your shovels and rakes and wear our boots and enter the gutter and start cleaning." Abdallah didn't stop there: "My people, the gutter we have here is not for the purpose of dumping rubbish but for the purpose of draining rainwater."

They stood quietly.

"Let's engage! We will clean the gutter," said Jordan a.k.a Mr. Skeleton. The people of Nima didn't hesitate so they started cleaning right from the years, days, weeks, months after that the Nima community was popular again but was known for their cleaning, because cleanliness is next to Godliness. Thank you.

The Nima drain is large and it is far away from the beginning of the gutter, and when children are playing beside the drain, some of them fall inside. And those who sell on the pavement, they don't let the people walk on the streets. They block the way that people will pass. So it causes accidents. The street vendors are selling on the pavement, beside the drain, so people cannot pass there.

So I would like the assemblyman to come and cover the drain so that the sellers who sell on the pavement will come on the drain so that people will walk on the pavements.

And Emmanuel shouted, "Let's cover the drain and make it as a

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walkway, then let's make a market park for the street vendors to sell on."

So the work started. People were holding long brooms to sweep the dust and the sand. During the work, they used dustbins and shovels to clean the dirt. They wanted to put tiles to enhance the community. They fixed pavement tiles so the place will be used for a walkway.

So the assembly man donated cement and sand to put the pavement tiles and paid the water bills to mix the cement with the water. They used the machines that are used for mixing cement and water. Dr. Mustapha also gave us a huge amount of money to contribute.

So now Nima is a very beautiful area and there is no feces in the drains, and the food vendors come back on the drain so people pass on the pavement, so now no accidents and no feces in the gutters.

Tears of a Poor Girl

Talata was ten years old when she started facing problems with the public space in her community like the lungus, streets and pavements. She wanted to become a very intelligent teenager when she was in the junior high school, but her mother's poverty made things difficult. Also to look up to needs and comfortable life. Talata's life was opposite.

Talata's father had bought a camera for her before he died. And Talata had always wanted to be a journalist so she used the camera to take pictures of what she faces with her communities' public spaces. In spite of all her troubles, Talata did not give up.

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She was determined to become a journalist in future like her late uncle had been.

So she could expose all the bad things she had seen people do in the lungus both in the days and under the cover of night. Talata had witnessed many crimes in the lungus and sometimes on the streets and she was hoping that some day she would bring them to light.

She had seen many girls of her age engaged in promiscuous activities during the night in the lungus and some were also forced into marriage at the ages of 12 to 15 years.

Talata's passion for journalism grew as she witnessed all these brutalities. Her ambition was to purge the society of all these vices by exposing criminal activities on the public space and propagating a message of moral lifestyle. She thought that if she were to become a journalist she would use the media to inform the government and the nation at large, about all the immoral activities that take place in the public space.

Finally when she got an opportunity to start learning at an NGO office, she was introduced to a lady who decided to do a workshop on public space and taught her how to solve problems in the public space. And when she grew up she successfully became the journalist she aspired to be and with help of the Municipal Assembly Man and Member of Parliament of their area, she solved all the problems in the public spaces like bringing in dustbins, the DOWVSU [Domestic Violence Victims Support Unit] and the police men.

And that was how Talata solved the problems in the public space.

Bumpers and Zebra Crossings

With the absence of bumpers, zebra crossings, road signs and traffic lights, there is the presence of road accidents, reckless driving and riding, traffic jams, and difficulty when it comes to crossing the street. With the presence of zebra crossings and bumpers, crossing the street becomes easy because cars slow down when they get closer to the bumpers and zebra crossings.

This reduces the rate of knocking down pedestrians crossing the street. With the presence of traffic lights it minimizes the traffic jams in Nima. Road signs, bumpers and zebra crossings help reduce road accidents.

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